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It's a woman's world.



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# *It's a Woman's World*

It's a mystery — a woman's world — and it holds endless fascination for two kinds of people. One is the universal male, who would sell his soul to get the lowdown on women. The other is the eternal female, who knows all there is to know about her own kind but wants to hear more anyway. Between them, they include all of us.

For these two groups of people, Mary Louise Aswell, Literary Editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, has designed a book. It's an answer book to "Why is a woman?" In its groups of stories, written by the best feminine writers of our day, you'll find realistic portraits of women in love, women and children, women and war, and women's professions. There's a section, too, about women who are completely individualistic — the section in which all women believe they belong!



It's a  
Woman's  
World ~ ~ ~

*A Collection of  
Stories from  
HARPER'S BAZAAR*

*Edited by*  
MARY LOUISE ASWELL

Whittlesey House  
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IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD

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# Foreword

**T**HIS brief note is addressed to gentlemen. *Caveat mulier*—madam, take heed! Where sensible angels fear to tread, I have accepted the invitation to rush in. I am the bidden bull in the china shop. Of course, the ladies have protected themselves (as usual) by putting the best porcelain on the high shelves. That is, they have already arranged one preface for each new genre of stories in this book; little is left for me to add in the way of explanation, apology or praise. Besides, the male, solo among female myriads, is an eternal supernumerary. Nevertheless, these words are for men, and not to solicit reinforcement, but to counsel attention. Here is some of the best contemporary men's reading in print.

*It's a woman's world.* We who sit opposite the distaff have an easy rejoinder: Look at it! But I think the title is deliberately mistaken. It intends to ruffle male feathers into purchase; and it plans to flatter putative lady customers—the obverse act, feather-petting. For, while these stories (and three or four essays) irradiate the world in which women live, they show it to be in no sense a world they possess, but one, rather, for which they struggle with all their hearts.

Here, they have laid their hearts on the line—their hearts, their inward awareness, their compassion, malice, terror, and the bejeweled variety of their literary skill. It is an event no questing male should miss. Their writing is as different as they are and yet it has a subjective kinship which makes it all alike—the way we say they are. They apply their prose with passionate restraint—now honestly—now as deviously as they apply their make-up—but always for the same life-and-death purposes.

These high moments of so many accomplished ladies were not meant to be set side by side. Thereby the book becomes definitive inadvertently: the Muses merge; the composite photograph grows archetypal; like Norns, the women stitch and knit

on the fabric of life. Edita Morris tarts macabre jollity, Dorothy Parker purls piercing dreadfulness, Mary McCarthy makes laine of a woman's dangerous braininess, and Josephine W. Johnson abjures Purgatory by revealing it is where courage lives. Even a swatch of yesterday's material is shown: Anita Loos' blondes whom gentlemen once preferred—gone out of mode, corny, and alarming, like the Twenties.

One minor item—a theme on the persons and impedimenta peripheral to Katharine Hepburn—seems to reflect an editorial opinion that this nonsense is the Coming Thing. I would not quarrel with the thought that the Hepburns may be first, after the war, to join what I shall tentatively dub "the helicopter set." But all the dazzling rest of the *Harper's Bazaar* contributors are against Glamor as religion. They have found out that star-dust, like smoke, can get in your eyes.

There are a few wonderful stories about children in this book. But the others (whether or not the anthologist knows it) are about men: men espoused and men renounced, absent men and dead, too many lovers and none, rich men and poor, soldiers, writers, you, me. For the world of women, although not ours—is us. And the man who does not learn the meaning of that is lost. These are modern Sybils. Hear them. *Caveat homo!*

PHILIP WYLIE

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*It's a Woman's World*



# Women in Love

**B**ECAUSE we decided on the general theme of stories by women, about women in arranging this anthology, it seemed sensible to group them according to the motif they chiefly develop. That implies a typically feminine emphasis on subjective material; but it does not mean that the stories were written to illustrate any particular point, and it is hoped that they will be read as they were written, for themselves alone. We are not trying to exhaust the theme of Woman. Though our signboard reads, "Here are some revelations about women by those who ought to know," what we are offering is primarily a collection of exciting stories, some grave, some gay, some long, some short, some simple, some complex. And because love, though it may be no longer woman's whole existence, still is her dynamo, we start with Women in Love.

Conventionally, we look to France for maturity in sexual matters, and in Colette we find a mistress of the female heart. Her "white night" has been shared by women in bed with their lovers everywhere.

But love has younger, earlier stages that women have also known and recognize. In "The Winds" Eudora Welty recaptures the child's generous, seeking love which embraces the whole universe of private significance and delight, includes the inevitable love for the "big girl" across the street, is climaxed in the adolescent's yearning, "forever making ready" for the One who will come—"When? when? when?"

Dorothy Baker's preliminary sketch for her novel *Trio* portrays, as the novel does, the struggle between a young girl's normal love for a boy and the hold exercised over her by another influence. The conflict in "Romance" emphasizes the tender, delicately tough fiber of love's tentative groping for stability and permanence.

Married love has so often been treated with a gravity amounting to boredom that we prefer Virginia Woolf's sly, penetrating skit on the crash of the honeymoon's end, of the young matron's sentimental dream. Many ardent admirers of Mrs. Woolf's novels are unfamiliar with her short stories, and since there will be, alas, no more of them, those that we have should be required reading for lovers of good writing.

Woman's search for love can also become, if necessary, a chase, its end either a capture or The Broken Heart. "Slews of Love" is the Briggsy section of Helen Howe's novel *The Whole Heart*, and a bride's blind, complacent sense of achievement has never been more sharply conveyed; while The Broken Heart is sympathetically satirized in Dorothy Parker's "Advice to the Little Peyton Girl."

And "The Cure" is Colette's wise, worldly answer to the problem the little Peyton girl poses for all women in love.

# *Nuit Blanche*

---

*by COLETTE*

THERE is in our house but one bed, too large for you, a bit narrow for the two of us. It is chaste, white, bare; no draperies, in the light of day, veil its honest candor. Those who come to visit us regard it tranquilly, with no furtive, conspiratorial side glances, because it slopes in the middle to a single soft valley, like the bed of a young girl who sleeps alone. They little know, those who enter here, that every night our two bodies press deeper, under its luxurious shroud, this valley no wider than a tomb. . . .

Bare is our bed! A lamp bends over it, and in the glare it seems barer still. Not for us, at dusk, the artful, spiderweb gray that filters through filmy canopies, nor the rose, shell-thin glow of a night light. . . . Star of no dawn and no waning, our bed extinguishes its blaze only to plunge into a profound and velvet night.

A halo of perfume hovers over it; almost as though it were, in its rigid whiteness, a blessed corpse. The perfume is surprisingly complex; as we breathe it in deeply, attentively, we distinguish the blond soul of your favorite tobacco, the scent, blonder still, of your own skin, the hint of burnt sandalwood that is my own . . . but that country smell of crushed grasses, who can say whether it is yours or mine?

We have been intoxicated this spring day by a mood at once feverish and sluggish. . . . Now I lie quiet, my head against your shoulder. Until the morrow I am about to fall into the depths of a dark slumber, so stubborn, so closeted, that against it the wings of dreams must beat in vain. I am going to sleep. . . . Only wait until I have found a cooler spot for my burn-

ing, tingling feet. . . . You haven't moved. Your breathing is long and measured, but your still watchful shoulder hollows to make room for my cheek. . . . Let's sleep. . . . How short, these May nights! Despite the blue dusk that bathes us now, my eyelids are still filled with sun, with rose flame and dancing shadow, and with closed eyes I look back over my day, as from the shelter of blinds one might contemplate the bright profusion of a summer garden. . . .

How my heart beats! And yours too, I can hear it thudding away under my cheek. Aren't you asleep? I raise my head a little, I dimly make out the paleness of your head thrown back, the tawny shadow of your hair. Your knees are as cool as two oranges. Turn my way, that I may steal some of their smooth coolness for my own. . . .

Oh, to sleep, to sleep! . . . Imps seem to be racing in my blood. The muscles of my legs throb, there is a humming in my ears. . . . Has someone scattered pine needles in our bed tonight? We must, we *must* sleep. . . .

But I can't sleep. And you . . . though you lie still as death I can feel your own quivering wakefulness. . . . You do not stir. You hope that I am asleep. But sometimes through tender habit your arm tightens around me, your feet press against mine. . . . Sleep flutters near, brushes lightly against me, flies away—yes, I see it go!—like that butterfly I chased so gaily among the iris. . . . Do you remember? A whole day exalted by light and heady youth! . . . Sharp, hurried gusts of wind sent a screen of swiftly moving clouds across the sun, withering the too-tender leaves of the limes; and the flowers of the walnut tree fell like singed caterpillars into our hair. . . . The shoots of the currant bushes that you broke off, the budding wild sorrel on the lawn, the mint still young and brown, the sage downy as a hare's ear—all overflowed with a peppery, energetic sap that I tasted on my lips like a mixture of alcohol and citron water. . . .

All I could think of was to laugh and shout, trampling as I ran the long juicy grass that stained my dress. . . . It was your quiet joy that kept watch over my madness. When I stretched up my hand to gather the dogwood blossoms—their

pink, remember, like a blush—your hand was there before mine to break off the branch, and you stripped it one by one of its coral thorns that curved like claws. . . . You gave me flowers without weapons. . . .

Flowers without weapons. . . . When, exhausted and panting, I threw myself down, you found for me the shadiest spot in the garden, under the purple clusters of the lilac. . . . You gathered cornflowers for me, those enchanting flowers whose furry hearts smell deliciously of apricot. . . . At tea-time, when my ravenous hunger made you smile, you poured off the cream from the little pitcher of milk. . . . You gave me the roll with the most golden crust, and I still see your hand transparent in the sun, raised to drive away the buzzing wasp that had caught in my disheveled hair. . . . And when, toward the end of the afternoon, a longer cloud than usual lingered across the sun, and I shivered, moist, yes, drunk with a delight for which mankind has no name, the guileless delight of beasts happy in the springtime, you threw over my shoulders a gauzy shawl. . . . You said to me, “Let’s return . . . you’ve had enough . . . let’s go in!” You said to me. . . .

Oh, if I think about you, that’s the end of sleep! What time just struck? Already the windows are blue with light. Is it the murmur of my blood that I hear, or does it come from the gardens, out there? . . . Are you asleep? No; if I placed my cheek against yours, I would feel your eyelashes quiver like the wing of a captive fly. . . . You are not asleep. You keep guard over my fever. You protect me from bad dreams; you are thinking of me just as I am thinking of you; only a strange sentimental modesty makes us pretend this peaceful slumber. Beside you my body lies quiet and relaxed, my neck weighs against your soft shoulder; but out beyond the blue dawn our thoughts meet and discreetly love. . . .

Soon that luminous square between the curtains will brighten, turn pink. . . . A few minutes more, and I shall be able to read on your handsome forehead, your finely molded chin, on your melancholy mouth and closed eyelids, the wish to seem asleep. . . . This is the hour when my nerves, overwrought with fatigue and insomnia, can contain themselves no longer,

when I throw my arms outside this sleepless bed, and my spiteful heels get ready to beat their sly tattoo. . . .

So now you pretend to wake up! Now at last I may seek refuge in you, with confused and unjust complaints, rebellious little sighs, grumblings about the day that is too soon here, the night that has taken so long to end, the noises in the street. . . . Because I know, oh, how well, that you will tighten your embrace, and that, if the cradling of your arms does not suffice to calm me, your kiss will hold me faster still, your hands grow more soothing, and your love will be a sovereign spell that will drive from me all the demons of fever, anger, and unrest. . . . You will give me love, eyes filled with a maternal anxiety, you who seek, beyond the woman in your arms, the child that is yet to be yours. . . .

# The Winds

---

by EUDORA WELTY

**W**HEN Josie first woke up in the night she thought the big girls of the town were having a hayride. Choruses and cries of what she did not question to be joy came stealing through the air of the streets. An excitement touched her and she could see in her imagination the leaning wagon approaching; the long white-stockinged legs of the big girls hung down in a fringe on one side of the hay—then as the horses made a turn, the boys' black stockings stuck out the other side.

But while her heart rose longingly to the pitch of their delight, hands reached under her and she was lifted out of bed.

"Don't be frightened," said her father's voice into her ear, as if he told her a secret.

Am I old? Am I invited? she wondered, stricken.

The chorus seemed to envelop her, but it was her father's thin nightshirt she lay against in the dark.

"I still say it's a shame to wake them up." It was her mother's voice coming from the doorway, though strangely argumentative for so late in the night.

Then they were all moving in the stirring darkness, all in their nightgowns, she and Will being led by their mother and father, and they in turn with their hands out as if they were being led by something invisible. They moved off the sleeping porch into the rooms of the house. The calls and laughter of the older children came closer, and Josie thought that at any moment their voices would come all together, and they would sing their favorite round, "Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream—merrily merrily merrily merrily—"

"Don't turn on the lights," said her father, as if to keep the

halls and turnings secret within. They passed the front bedroom; she knew it by the scent of her mother's verbena sachet and waist shape of the mirror which showed in the dark. But they did not go in there. Her father put little coats about them. In her sleep she seemed to have dreamed the sounds of all the windows closing, upstairs and down. Coming out of the guest room was a sound like a nest of little mice in the hay; in a flash of pride and elation Josie discovered it to be the squeak of the empty bed rolling around on its wheels. Then close beside them was a small musical tinkle against the floor, and she knew the sound; it was Will's Tinker-Toy building coming apart and the wooden spools and rods scattering down.

"Oh, boy!" cried Will, spreading his arms high in his sleep and beginning to whirl about. "The house is falling down!"

"Hush," said their mother, catching him.

"Never mind," said their father, smoothing Josie's hair, but speaking over her head. "Downstairs."

The hour had never seemed so late in their house as when they made this slow and unsteady descent. The stairway gave like a chain. The pendulum shivered in the clock.

They moved into the living room. The summer matting was down on the floor, cracked and lying in little ridges as always under their sandals, smelling of its stains and dust, of thin green varnish and of its origin in China. The sheet of music open on the piano had caved in while they slept, and gleamed faintly like a shell in the shimmer and flow of the strange light. Josie's drawing of the plaster cast of Joan of Arc, which it had taken her all summer to do for her mother, had rolled itself tightly up on the desk like a diploma. Were they all going away and leave that? They wandered separately for a moment looking like strangers at the wicker chairs. The cretonne pillows smelled like wet stones. Outside the beseeching cries rose and fell, and drew nearer. The curtains hung almost still, like poured cream, down the windows, but on the table the petals shattered all at once from a bowl of roses. Then the chorus of wildness and delight seemed to come almost into their street, though still it held its distance, exactly like the wandering wagon filled with the big girls and boys at night.

Will in his little shirt was standing straight up with his eyes closed, erect as a spinning top.

“He’ll sleep through it,” said their mother. “You take him, and I’ll take the girl.” With a little push, she divided the children; she was unlike herself. Their mother and father sat down opposite each other in the wicker chairs. They were waiting.

“Is it a moonlight picnic?” asked Josie.

“It’s a storm,” said her father. He answered her questions formally in a kind of deep courtesy always, which did not depend on the day or night. “This is the equinox.”

Josie gave a leap at that and ran to the front window and looked out.

“Josie!”

She was looking for the big girl who lived in the double house across the street. There was a strange fluid lightning which she now noticed for the first time to be filling the air, violet and rose, and soundless of thunder; and the eyes of the double house seemed to open and shut with it.

“Josie, come back.”

“I see Cornella. I see Cornella in the equinox, there in her high-heeled shoes.”

“Nonsense,” said her father. “Nonsense, Josie.”

But she stood with her back to all of them and looked, saying, “I see Cornella.”

“How many times have I told you that you need not concern yourself with Cornella!” The way her mother said her name was not diminished now.

“I see Cornella. She’s on the outside, Mama, outside in the storm, and she’s in the equinox.”

But her mother would not answer.

“Josie, don’t you understand—I want to keep us close together,” said her father. She looked back at him. The lightning stamped the pattern of his dressing gown on the room. “Once in an equinoctial storm,” he said cautiously over the sleeping Will, “a man’s little girl was blown away from him into a haystack out in a field.”

“The wind will blow Cornella,” said Josie.

But he called her back.

The house shook as if a big drum were being beaten down the street.

Her mother sighed. "Summer is over."

Josie drew closer to her, with a sense of consolation. Her mother's dark plait was as warm as her arm, and she tugged at it. In the coming and going of these glittering flashes and the cries and the calling voices of the equinox, summer was turning into the past. The long ago . . . The pulse of the lightning made the wide front window oftener light than dark, and the persistence of illumination seemed slowly to be waking something that had slept longer than Josie had slept, for her trembling body turned under her mother's hand.

"Be still," said her mother. "It's soon over."

They looked at one another, parents and children, as if through a turning wheel of light, while they waited in their various attitudes against the wicker arabesques and the flowered cloth. When the wind rose still higher, both mother and father went all at once silent, Will's eyes lifted open, and all their gazes confronted one another. Then in a single flickering, Will's face was lost in sleep. The house moved softly like a boat that has been stepped into.

Josie lay drifting in the chair, and where she drifted was through the summertime, the way of the past . . .

It seemed to her that there should have been more time for the monkey-man—for the premonition, the organ coming from the distance, the crisis in the house, "Is there a penny upstairs or down?" the circle of following children, their downcast looks of ecstasy, and for the cold imploring hand of the little monkey.

She woke only to hunt for signs of the fairies, and counted nothing but a footprint smaller than a bird claw. All of the sand pile went into a castle, and it was a rite to stretch on her stomach and put her mouth to the door. "O my Queen!" and the coolness of the whisper would stir the grains of sand within. Expectant on the floor were spread the sycamore leaves, Will's fur rugs with the paws, head, and tail. "I am thine eternally, my Queen, and will serve thee always and I will be enchanted with thy love forever." It was delicious to close both eyes and wait a length of time. Then, supposing a mockingbird sang in

the tree, "I ask for my first wish, to be made to understand the tongue of birds." They called her back because they had no memory of magic. Even a June bug, if he were caught and released, would turn into a being, and this was forgotten in the way people summoned one another.

Polishing the dark hall clock as though it was through her tending that the time was brought, the turbaned cook would be singing, "Dere's a hole in de bottom of de sea." "How old will I get to be, Johanna?" she would ask as she ran through the house. "Ninety-eight." "How old is Will going to be?" "Ninety-nine." Her bicycle was the golden Princess, the name in a scroll in front. She would take her as early as possible. So as to touch nothing, to make no print on the earliness of the day, she rode with no hands, no feet, touching nowhere but the one place, moving away into the leaves, down the swaying blackboards of the dewy alley. They called her back. She hung from and circled in order the four round posts, warm and filled with weight, on the porch. Green arched ferns, like great exhalations, spread from the stands. The porch was deep and wide and painted white with a blue ceiling, and the swing, like three sides of a box, was white too under its long quiet chains. She ran and jumped, secure that the house was theirs and identical with them—the pale smooth house seeming not to yield to any happening, with the dreamlike arch of the roof over the entrance like the curve of their upper lips.

All the children came running and jumping out. She went along chewing nasturtium stems and sucking the honey from four-o'clock flowers, out for whatever figs and pomegranates came to hand. She floated a rose petal dry in her mouth, and sucked on the spirals of honeysuckle and the knobs of purple clover. She wore crowns. She added flower necklaces as the morning passed, then bracelets, and applied transfer-pictures to her forehead and arms and legs—a basket of roses, a windmill, Columbus's ship, ruins of Athens. But always oblivious, off in the shade, the big girls reclined or pressed their flowers in a book.

And watching it all from the beginning, the morning going by, was the double house. This worn old house was somehow

in disgrace, as if it had been born into it and could not help it. Josie was sorry, and sorry that it looked like a face, with its wide-apart upper windows, the nose-like partition between the two sagging porches, the chimneys rising in listening points at either side, and the roof across which the birds sat. It watched, and by not being what it should have been, the house was inscrutable. There was always some noise of disappointment to be heard coming from within—a sigh, a thud, something dropped. There were eight children in all that came out of it—all sizes, but all tow-headed, as if they might in some way all be kin under that roof, and they had a habit of arranging themselves in the barren yard in a little order, like an octave, and staring out across the street at the rest of the neighborhood—as if to state, in their rude way, “This is us.” Everyone was cruelly prevented from playing with the children of the double house, no matter how in their humility they might change—in the course of the summer they would change to an entirely new set, though somehow there were always exactly eight. Cornella, being nearly grown and being transformed by age, was not to be counted simply as a forbidden playmate—yet sometimes, as if she wanted to be just that, she chased after them, or stood in the middle while they ran a ring around her.

In the morning was Cornella’s time of preparation. She was forever making ready. Big girls were usually idle, but Cornella, as occupied as a child, vigorously sunned her hair, or else she had always just washed it and came out busily to dry it. It was bright yellow, wonderfully silky and long, and she would bend her neck and toss her hair over her head before her face like a waterfall. And her hair was as constant a force as a waterfall to Josie, under whose eyes alone it fell. Cornella, Cornella, let down thy hair, and the King’s son will come climbing up.

Josie watched her, for there was no one else to see, how she shook it and played with it and presently began to brush it, over and over, out in public. But always through the hiding hair she would be looking out, steadily out, over the street. Josie, who followed her gaze, felt the emptiness of their street, too, and could not understand why at such a moment no one

could be as pitiful as only the old man driving slowly by in the cart, and no song could be as sad as his song,

“Milk, milk,  
Buttermilk!  
Sweet potatoes—roastin’-ears—green peas—  
And buttermilk!”

But Cornella, instead of being moved by this sad moment, in which Josie’s love began to go toward her, stamped her foot. She was angry, angry. To see her then, oppression touched Josie and held her quite still. Called in to dinner before she could understand, she felt a conviction: I will never catch up with her. No matter how old I get, I will never catch up with Cornella. She felt that daring and risking everything went for nothing; she would never take a poison wild strawberry into her mouth again in the hope of finding out the secret and the punishment of the world, for Cornella, whom she might love, had stamped her foot, and had as good as told her: “You will never catch up.” All that she ran after in the whole summer world came to life in departure before Josie’s eyes and covered her vision with wings. It kept her from eating her dinner to think of all that she had caught or meant to catch before the time was gone—June bugs in the banana plants to fly before breakfast on a thread, lightning bugs that left a bitter odor in the palms of the hands, butterflies with their fierce and haughty faces, bees in a jar. A great tempest of droning and flying seemed to have surrounded her as she ran, and she seemed not to have moved without putting her hand out after something that flew ahead. . . .

“There! I thought you were asleep,” said her father.

She turned in her chair. The house had stirred.

“Show me their tracks,” muttered Will. “Just show me their tracks.”

As though the winds were changed back into songs, Josie seemed to hear “Beautiful Ohio” slowly picked out in the key of C down the hot afternoon. That was Cornella. Through the tied-back curtains of parlors the other big girls, with rats in their hair and lace insertions in their white dresses, practiced

forever on one worn little waltz, up and down the street, for they took lessons.

“Come spend the day with me.” “See who can eat a banana down without coming up to breathe.” That was Josie and her best friend, smirking at each other.

They wandered at a trot under their own parasols. In the vacant field, in the center of summer, was a chinaberry tree, as dark as a cloud in the middle of the day. Its frail flowers or its bitter yellow balls lay trodden always over the whole of the ground. There was a little path that came through the hedge and went its way to this tree, and there was an old low seat built partway round the trunk, on which was usually lying an abandoned toy of some kind. Here beside the nurses stood the little children, whose level eyes stared at the rosettes on their garters.

“How do you do?”

“How do you do?”

“I remembers you. Where you all think you goin’?”

“We don’t have to answer.”

They went to the drugstore and treated each other. It was behind the latticed partition. How well she knew its cut-out pasteboard grapes whose color was put on a little to one side. Her elbows slid smoothly out on the cold damp marble that smelled like hyacinths. “You say first.” “No, you. First you love me, last you hate me.” When they were full of sweets it was never too late to take the long way home. They ran through the park and drank from the fountain. Moving slowly as sunlight over the grass were the broad and dusty backs of pigeons. They stopped and made a clover chain and hung it on a statue. They groveled in the dirt under the bandstand hunting for lost money, but when they found a dead bird with its feathers cool as rain, they ran out in the sun. Old Biddy Felix came to make a speech, he stood up and shouted with no one to listen—“The time flies, the time flies!”—and his arm and hand flew like a bat in the ragged sleeve. Walking the seesaw, she held her breath for him. They floated magnolia leaves in the horse trough, themselves taking the part of the wind and waves, and suddenly remembering who they were. They closed in upon

the hot-tamale man, fixing their frightened eyes on his lantern and on his scars.

Josie never came and she never went without touching the dragon—the Chinese figure in the garden on the corner that in biting held rain water in the cavern of its mouth. And never did it seem so still, so utterly of stone, as when all the children said “Good-by” as they always did on that corner, and she was left alone with it. Stone dragons opened their mouths and begged to swallow the day, they loved to eat the summer. It was painful to think of even pony rides gobbled, the way they all went, the children, every one—except from the double house—crammed into the basket with their heads stuck up like candy almonds in a treat. She backed all the way home from the dragon.

But she had only to face the double house in her meditations, and then she could invoke Cornella. Thy name is Corn, and thou art like the ripe corn, beautiful Cornella. And before long the figure of Cornella would be sure to appear. She would dart forth from one old screen door of the double house, trailed out by the nagging odor of cabbage cooking. She would have just bathed and dressed, for it took her so long, and her bright hair would be done in puffs and curls with a bow behind.

Cornella was not even a daughter in her side of the house, she was only a niece or a cousin, there only by the frailest indulgence. She would come out with this frailty about her, come without a hat, without anything. Between the double house and the next house was the strongest fence that could be built, and no ball had ever come back that went over it. It reached all the way out to the street. So Cornella could never see if anyone might be coming, unless she came all the way out to the curb and leaned around the corner of the fence. Josie knew the way it would happen, and yet it was like new always. At the opening of the door, the little towheads would scatter, dash to the other side of the partition, disappear as if by consent. Then lightly down the steps, down the walk, Cornella would come, in some kind of secrecy swaying from side to side, her skirts swinging round, and the sidewalk echoing smallly to her pumps with the baby-Louis heels. Then, all alone, Cornella

would turn and gaze away down the street, in a little pantomime of hope and apprehension that would not permit Josie to stir.

But the moment came when without meaning to she lifted her hand softly, and made a sign to Cornella. She almost said her name.

And Cornella—what was it she had called back across the street, the flash of what word, so furious and yet so frail and thin? It was more furious than even the stamping of a foot, only a single word.

Josie took her hand down. In a seeking humility she stood there and bore her shame to attend Cornella. Cornella herself would stand still, haughtily still, waiting as if on guard, until a voice old and cracked would call from the upper window, "Cornella, Cornella!" And she, too, would have to turn around and go inside again, her hair ribbon and her sash in pale bows that sank down in the back.

Then for Josie the sun on her bangs stung, and the pity for ribbons drove her to a wild capering that would end in a tumble as she dashed for shelter. . . .

Will woke up with a yell like a wild Indian.

"Here, let me hold him," said his mother. Her voice had become soft; time had passed. She took Will on her lap.

Josie opened her eyes. The lightning was flowing like the sea, and the cries were like waves at the door. Her parents' faces were made up of hundreds of very still moments.

"Tomahawks!" screamed Will.

"Mother, don't let him—" Josie said uneasily.

"Never mind. You talk in your sleep, too," said her mother.

She experienced a kind of shock, a little shock of detachment, like the time in the picture show when a little blurred moment of the summer's May Festival had been thrown on the screen and there was herself, ribbon in hand, weaving once in and once out, a burning and abandoned look in the flicker of her face as though no one in the world would ever see her.

Her mother's hand stretched to her, but Josie broke away. She lay with her face hidden in the pillow. . . . The summer day became vast and opalescent with twilight. The calming

and languid smell of manure came slowly to meet her as she passed through the back gate and went out to the pasture among the mounds of wild roses. "Daisy," she had only to say once, in her quietest voice, for she felt very near to the cow. There she walked, not even eating—Daisy, the small tender Jersey with her soft violet nose, walking and presenting her warm side. Josie bent to lean her forehead against her. Here the tears from her eyes could go rolling down Daisy's shining coarse hairs, and Daisy did not move or speak but held patient, richly compassionate, and still. . . .

"You're not frightened any more, are you, Josie?" asked her father.

"No, sir," she said, with her face buried. . . . She thought of the evening, the sunset, the stately game played by the flowering hedge when the vacant field was theirs. "Here comes the duke a-riding, riding, riding. . . . What are you riding here for, here for? . . ." while the hard iron sound of the Catholic church bell tolled at twilight for unknown people. "The fairest one that I can see. . . . London Bridge is falling down. . . . Lady Moon, Lady Moon, show your shoe. . . . I measure my love to show you. . . ." Under the fiery windows, how small the children were. "Fox in the morning!—Geese in the evening!—How many have you got?—More than you can ever catch!" The children were rose-colored, too. Fading, rolling shouts came away from them. As if they played in a seashell where an ear was listening, she felt the remoteness of their life then. The running children cast long flying shadows behind them, and to watch them she stood still. Above everything in the misty blue dome of the sky was the full white moon. So it is, for a true thing, round, she thought, and where she waited a hand seemed to reach around and take her under the loose-hanging hair, and words in her thoughts came shaped like grapes in her throat. She felt lonely. She would stop a runner. "Did you know the moon was round?" "I did. Annie told me last summer." The game went on. But I must find out everything about the moon, Josie thought in the solemnity of evening. The moon and tides. O moon! O tides! I ask thee. I ask thee. Where dost thou rise and fall? As if it were this knowl-

edge which she would allow to enter her heart, for which she had been keeping room, and as if it were the moon, known to be round, that would go floating through her dreams forever and never leave her, she looked steadily up at the moon. The moon looked down at her, full with all the lonely time to go.

When night was about to fall, the time came to bring out her most precious possession, the steamboat she had made from a shoe box. In all her boats the full moon, half moon, and new moon were cut out of each side for the windows, with tissue paper through which shone the unsteady candle inside. She knew this journey ahead of time as if it were long ago, the hushing noise the boat made being dragged up the brick walk by the string, the leap it had to take across the three-cornered missing place over the big root, the spreading smell of warm wax in the evening, and the remembered color of the daylight turning. Coming to meet the boat was another boat, shining and gliding as if by itself.

Children greeted each other dreamily at twilight.

“Choo-chool!”

“Choo-chool!”

And something made her turn after that and see how Cornella stood and looked across at them, all dressed in gauze, looking as if the street were a river flowing along between, and she did not speak at all. Josie understood: she *could* not. It seemed to her as she guided her warm boat that under the brightening moon Cornella would have turned into a tree if she could, there in the front yard of the double house, and that the center of the tree would have to be seen into before her heart was bared, so undaunted and so filled with hope. . . .

“I’ll shoot you dead!” screamed Will.

“Hush, hush,” said their mother.

Her father held up his hand and said, “Listen.”

Then their house was taken to the very breast of the storm.

Josie lay as still as an animal, and in panic thought of the future . . . the sharp day when she would come running out of the field holding the ragged stems of the quick-picked goldenrod and the warm flowers thrust out for a present for somebody. The future was herself bringing presents, the season

of gifts. When would the day come when the wind would fall and they would sit in silence on the fountain rim, their play done, and the boys would crack the nuts under their heels? If they would bring the time around once more, she would lose nothing that was given, she would hoard the nuts like a squirrel.

For the first time in her life she thought, might the same wonders never come again? Was each wonder original and alone like the falling star, and when it fell did it bury itself beyond where you hunted it? Should she hope to see it snow twice, and the teacher running again to open the window, to hold out her black cape to catch it as it came down, and then going up and down the room quickly, quickly, to show them the snowflakes? . . .

"Mama, where is my muff that came from Marshall Field's?"

"It's put away, it was your grandmother's present. Are you dreaming?" Her mother felt of her forehead.

"I want my little muff to hold." She ached for it. "Mother, give it to me."

"Keep still," said her mother softly.

Her father came over and kissed her, and as if a new kiss could bring memory she remembered the night. . . . It was that very night. How could she have forgotten and nearly let go what was closest of all?

The whole way, as they walked slowly after supper past the houses, and the wet of sprinkled lawns was rising like a spirit over the streets, the locusts were filling the evening with their old delirium, the swell that would rise and die away.

In the Chautauqua when they got there, there was a little cluster of stars beyond the hole in the top of the tent retained from the walk, and the canvas sides gave off sighs and stirred, and a knotted rope knocked outside. It was wartime where there were grown people, and the vases across the curtained stage held little bunches of flags on sticks which drooped and wilted like flowers before their eyes. Josie and Will sat waiting on the limber board in the front row, their feet hanging into the spice clouds of sawdust. The curtains parted. Waiting with lifted hands was a company with a sign beside them saying,

“The Trio.” All were ladies, one in red, one in white, and one in blue, and after one smile which touched them all at the same instant, like a match struck in their faces, they began to play a piano, a cornet, and a violin.

At first, in the hushed disappointment which filled the Chautauqua tent in beginning moments, the music had been sparse and spare, like a worn hedge through which the hiders can be seen. But then, when hope had waned, there had come a little transition to another key, and the woman with the cornet had stepped forward, raising her instrument.

If morning-glories had come out of the horn instead of those sounds, Josie would not have felt a more astonished delight. She was pierced with pleasure. The sounds that so tremulously came from the striving of the lips were welcome and sweet to her. Between herself and the lifted cornet there was no barrier, there was only the stale, expectant air of the old shelter of the tent. The cornetist was beautiful. There in the flame-like glare that was somehow shadowy, she had come from far-away, and the long times of the world seemed to be about her. She was draped heavily in white, shaded with blue, like a queen, and she stood braced and looking upward like the figure-head on the Viking ship. As the song drew out, Josie could see the slow appearance of a little vein in her cheek. Her closed eyelids seemed almost to whir and yet to rest motionless, like the wings of a hummingbird, when she reached the high note. The breaths she took were fearful, and a little medallion of some kind lifted each time on her breast. Josie listened in mounting care and suspense, as if the performance led in some direction away—as if a destination were being shown her.

And there not far away, with her face all wild, was Cornella, listening too, and still alone. In some alertness Josie turned and looked back for her parents, but they were far back in the crowd; they did not see her, they were not listening. She was let free, and turning back to the cornetist, who was transfixed beneath her instrument, she bent gently forward and closed her hands together over her knees.

“Josie!” whispered Will, prodding her.

“That’s my name.” But she would not talk to him.

She had come home tired, in a dream. But after the light had been turned out on the sleeping porch, and the kisses of her family were put on her cheek, she had not fallen asleep. She could see out from the high porch that the town was dark, except where beyond the farthest rim of trees the old cotton-seed mill with its fiery smokestack and its lights forever seemed an inland boat that waited for the return of the sea. It came over her how the beauty of the world had come with its sign and had stridden through their town that night; and it seemed to her that a proclamation had been made in the last high note of the lady trumpeter when her face had become set in its passion, and that after that there would be no more waiting and no more time left for the one who did not take heed and follow. . . .

There was a breaking sound, the first thunder.

"You see!" said her father. He struck his palms together, and it thundered again. "It's over."

"Back to bed, every last one of you," said her mother, as if it had all been something done to tease her, and now her defiance had won. She turned a light on and off.

"Pow!" cried Will, and then toppled into his father's arms, and was carried up the stairs.

From then on there was only the calm steady falling of rain.

Josie was placed in her wintertime bed. They would think her asleep, for they had all kissed one another in a kind of triumph to do for the rest of the night. The rain was a sleeper's sound. She listened for a time to a tapping that came at her window, like a plea from outside . . . From whom? She could not know. Cornella, sweet summertime, the little black monkey, poor Biddy Felix . . . the lady with the horn whose lips were parted? Had they after all asked something of her? There, outside, was all that was wild and beloved and estranged, and all that would beckon and leave her, and all that was beautiful. She wanted to follow, and by some metamorphosis she would take them in—all—every one. . . .

The first thing next morning Josie ran outdoors to see what signs the equinox had left. The sun was shining. Will was already out, gruffly exhorting himself, digging in his old hole

to China. The double house across the street looked as if its old age had come upon it at last. Nobody was to be seen at the windows, and not a child was near. The whole façade drooped and gave way in the soft light, like the face of an old woman fallen asleep in church. In all the trees in all the yards the leaves were slowly drooping, one by one, as if in breath after breath.

There at Josie's foot on the porch was something. It was a folded bit of paper, wet and pale and thin, trembling in the air and clinging to the pedestal of the column, as though this were the residue of some great wave that had rolled upon the rock and then receded for another time. It was a fragment of a letter. It was written not properly in ink but in indelible pencil, and so its message had not been washed away, as it might have been.

Josie knelt down and took the paper in both hands, and without moving read all that was there. Then she went to her room and put it into her most secret place, the little drawstring bag that held her dancing shoes. The name Cornella was on it, and it said, "O my darling I have waited so long when are you coming for me? Never a day or a night goes by that I do not ask When? When? When?" . . .

# *Romance*

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*by DOROTHY BAKER*

THE apartment where Danny Blake lived was an above-and-below sort of place; from the floor to the windows it was basement, but the bottoms of the windows were on a level with the sidewalk outside, so that anybody looking out the window could just stand there and look at the feet that walked by. It was a good enough pastime, but it ended by making Danny very conscious of the seams in women's stockings. He'd sit at his desk, studying, and when he'd hear footsteps on the sidewalk outside, he'd look; and if it was a woman and her seams were crooked, he always felt bad about it. He was doing a thesis in the department of philosophy on "The Concept of Property in the Roman Empire," and this worry about seams took up too much of his time.

At night he always had to keep the blinds pulled, so that people walking by couldn't look down on him. It was one of the drawbacks to the apartment. Another one was that the ceiling was all crossed up with a lot of asbestos-bound pipes. But there were good things about it, too. It was private, a no-neighbor apartment, like a house, almost; and it had a kitchen with an electric refrigerator in it, and a bathroom with a shower in it. And he didn't pay any rent, because he had the job of watching the heating plant and seeing to it that there was heat in the pipes when there should be, and none when there didn't absolutely have to be. He did that and some other little duties of a menial nature and that took care of his rent.

So he had a place to work in and sleep in and eat in and bathe in, and the fact that he could live, rent free, in the basement of another man's apartment had no connection with his choosing property as the subject of his thesis. It wasn't a doc-

toral dissertation, either; it was only a master's thesis, and all he had to do was get all the information he could handily come by, and then draw some sort of conclusion.

For all the tender care he gave the heating system, his own apartment was cold all winter. The pipes on the ceiling were warm but not enough to do any real good. The builders had omitted to put a radiator into the basement apartment, and the only thing to do when it got too cold was to light the oven in the kitchen. And this ran into money, the way comforts do.

This night he was sitting at his desk in front of a typewriter. He sat there with his chin in his hand and thought and thought. Once in a while he would type out two or three words and then cross them out with x's right away, and then wait again. It was cold, and he got up and went into the kitchen and took a look at the oven, and then went into the bathroom and got a bath towel and looped it around his neck, like a scarf, and stuck the ends inside his robe. When he came out, he stood for a while in the middle of his living room and looked up thoughtfully at the pipes, as if he might be intending to jump up and chin himself on one of them, but nothing came of it, and he sat down again in front of the typewriter and sighed a great many times. It took him a long time to get started, but after a while he began to write and the typewriter clicked along nicely and kept him from hearing a couple of taps at his window.

There were two taps, quite timid, and the typewriter made hay of both of them. But no man can write for very long without stopping to think, and so there came a pause and in the pause there was another tap, and this one made itself felt. The boy jumped at the window, got the blind up, and took a look. There was a girl outside, crouched down beside the window and all huddled up in her coat.

Danny Blake unlocked the window and shoved it up and said hello.

"I forgot where the door was," the girl said.

"It's clear around the other side of the building. Go around that way and I'll be there to meet you."

"What about the window?"

“All right.”

The girl sat down on the sidewalk and stuck both legs in the window, and then ducked her head in, squirmed around a little, and let herself slide. There was a little tearing sound, and as soon as she landed she straightened her coat and then felt the back of it.

“What did you do, tear it?”

“There must have been a nail somewhere.”

She looked at the window sill, and the nail was there, guilty as sin, with a tuft of camel’s hair on its head. The boy was very sorry. He’d put the nail there himself, because the blind wouldn’t stay down unless he wrapped the cord around something to hold it. The spring caught at the wrong places, and he needed some way to keep the blind down, so he drove the nail in, and it seemed like a good idea when he thought of it, but he had never supposed anyone would ever come in the window. “Especially you,” he said.

“If anyone had told me,” he said, “that I could ever hope to have you climb in my window and tear your coat on my window sill . . .” He stopped, holding out for a logical conclusion, and then said, “I never would have believed it, that’s all.”

“Why don’t you put down the window?” the girl said. She was feeling the back of her coat. There was a little jag in it. Nothing that couldn’t be fixed, but it was a very good coat, soft and tan with pearl buttons down the front and big pockets with flaps. Even the way she stood now, somewhat dejected and with one hand reaching low behind her, she looked almost cavalier in it.

Danny closed the window and locked it and then pulled down the blind and held it down.

“See,” he said, “it won’t stay down by itself.” He relaxed and let the blind go up, to prove it, and then pulled it down again and twisted the cord around the nail.

“It’s got to have something to hold it down,” he said, “but it’s a damned shame about your coat.”

“It doesn’t matter,” the girl said. “I can get an invisible mender to invisibly mend it. I’ll ask him invisibly to mend it.”

"I never heard of an invisible mender."

"Oh, they're all over. Everywhere you look."

The thing of standing here and talking like strangers about such indifferent subjects as nails and blinds and coats and tailors was fine, because these two were not strangers; they were intimates, only they didn't know each other very well. They would have to say things like this for a while until one or the other of them broke down, or until they let themselves look at each other, and that would be any minute now. The girl was looking down at the floor, getting ready to say something else, laying it out straight in her mind, and while she watched the floor Danny watched her.

"I didn't have much time," the girl said finally, "but I had to see you."

"Don't get the idea I didn't have to see *you*," Danny said. "You know what I've done today? I spent the morning at Liggett's in a phone booth. Put in my nickel and ring your boarding house, and in ten minutes or so somebody'd answer, and I'd ask for you, and whoever it was would go try to find you and then come back and say you weren't there. So I'd hang up and walk around the block, and come back and try it again, and next time go around the block twice, and then finally they got so they wouldn't answer the phone, so I went over and rang the doorbell, and you know what they said?"

"I wasn't there?" the girl said.

Danny nodded. "You might say I combed the town," he said. "Where were you?"

"I was in the French office correcting a set of papers."

"Not any of the times I was in there."

He didn't say this in any spirit of checking up, but the girl answered it fast, as if he had. "I don't always work in the French office," she said. "When there's a lot to do, I work in Renée's apartment, where it's quiet."

"Is that where you were?"

The girl nodded. "I've been there since eleven o'clock this morning. It's been an awful day."

"Where'd you have lunch?"

"Renée's."

"Do you call her Renée?"

"What should I call her?"

Danny thought a minute and said, "I sat in on a course of hers last year." He sounded embarrassed, as if he were saying, "I spent last year in a sanitarium, but I'm all right now."

The girl waited, and then he said the rest of it. "I didn't know any French, I just wanted to look at her three days a week."

"So did you?"

Danny nodded. "Three days a week, all year," he said. "And here you can go right into her house and call her Renée and stay for lunch."

The girl felt the back of her coat and looked annoyed.

"I've known her for four years," she said. "She taught at St. Catherine's when I was there and then when I came here she gave me a job reading for her."

She looked down a minute, and then said, "She's not very easy to work for. Not today anyhow."

"Where'd you have to go? Where's she live?"

"Up Amherst, clear to the end."

"That crazy-looking glass place with the round front, way up there?"

The girl nodded. "It's called The Piedmont, I don't know why."

"It's a mess," Danny said. "All it needs is some neon."

The girl raised her shoulders as if to say it was no fault of hers, and then she said, "It's nice inside."

Danny was tired of talking about French teachers and architecture and coats and nails. He looked at the girl now the way he wanted to look at her and said very quietly, "I'll tell you what. If it's really nice inside, we'll go there and live." He said it to see how it would sound to say it. They knew they couldn't go and live anywhere, all that could happen would be that the girl could come here and spend parts of some nights with him.

The girl didn't look up or give any sign of hearing him, and so he said what he really wanted to say.

"I'm glad you came. I was afraid maybe you'd got lost and I wouldn't be able to find you again."

That got through to her. She jerked her head up, almost as if he'd scared her, and then looked away again.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"What with?"

This wasn't going right. They ought to have been thinking the same thing, but maybe they weren't. Then the girl said it.

"I haven't got any time," she said. "I only wanted to see you."

"I've got all night," Danny said. "I had all night last night and I've got all night tonight."

It was a tender speech nicely said and deeply felt, but the girl moved away and pulled her coat higher around her shoulders and spoke in the other direction, away from him, but clearly enough. He heard the words.

"I can't come here again, and I hope you won't be. . . . I hope it will be all right, that's all."

"Sit down. Take off your coat."

The girl only looked at him, puzzled. Why should anyone want to take off a coat in a room as cold as this one, and why, since she had just said she couldn't stay, should she sit down?

She should sit down, Danny said, because he had some things to tell her, and it was very important to tell her, and to make her understand all about it. She shouldn't get herself worked up and make any funny decisions not to see him any more. He was afraid of that, and that's one reason why he'd spent the day trying to find her and tell her how it was. *"Look, Janet, this is how it is. Don't look that way. Listen to me. This is how it is:* Two people meet each other, that's the way it starts out, and that much is all clear. Somebody comes along and introduces them very correctly: Miss So-and-So, let me present Mr. So-and-So. People get themselves introduced to other people every day, and it doesn't matter at all. But anyhow they shake hands, these two, and then somebody asks them to go someplace, and then they're in a room with a lot of people they don't like much, and that makes a bond, so they clear out together, just the two of them, freshly introduced, and they go to a place called Bert's. And there they get sort of tight, just pleasantly hallucinated."

"You don't call what I was 'pleasantly hallucinated,' do you?"

"Wait a minute," he said, "hear me out, and then if you want to you can have a turn."

"They're at a place called Bert's, pleasantly hallucinated, and the first thing you know Danny Blake is out of money, as it so frequently happens, and Janet what's-her-name—"

"Black," the girl said. "The name's Janet Black."

"I know," Danny said. "I didn't think of it last night, but wouldn't we sound good hyphenated?"

She thought it over and liked it.

"But Daniel Blake is out of money, and Janet Black has left her purse at home, like a dope, so they come back here to Danny's to see about making some coffee, and they go in the basement door, and weave around through the furnace room, and Danny checks the thermostat and puts coal in the stoker, and Janet tells him about purgatory.

"Up to there it was all right, wasn't it?" Danny said, and the girl didn't say whether it was or wasn't.

Up to there it was fine. And if the rest of the night was a mess or a disappointment, if she got scared and everything went wrong, it wasn't anything to blow their brains out about. Give them time. Give them a little forbearance.

"I thought you were very beautifully inexperienced," he said.

"What do you say we don't talk about it?" the girl said.

"Sit down, please. Don't stand there with one foot up, like a stork."

"Oh, my God," the girl said. "I don't look like a stork, do I? I'd better get out of here."

She started fast for the door, and Danny ran and got between her and it like a villain in a play and said, "Now listen."

"Don't you see," he said, "that this is just the way it ought to be?" And when he said that, she went to pieces a little. All the stiffening went out of her legs and she went to the couch in the corner and sat down on the edge of it and put her hands over her face.

"I'm sick," she said between her hands. "I think I'm just about sick enough to die, but I don't seem to be able to."

Danny started to sit down beside her, and she jumped; so he stood up again and let her have it to herself. He went to his

desk and turned the chair around and sat down all the way across the room from her and watched her. She took her hands away from her face, pushed up a coat sleeve, and took a look at her watch. When she saw it, she drew a sharp breath.

“I’ve got to go.”

“Where to?”

She didn’t answer him directly, but she began to talk in a voice that she pushed out just enough for him to hear. She didn’t say anything but that she was tired, she’d had a horrible day, one of the worst, and she felt somehow as if she had just finished being flogged through the fleet, the whole damned entire fleet and a couple of tugboats to grow on, and what she’d like best would be to go to sleep, only it wouldn’t do much good, because sooner or later she would have to wake up again.

She looked across at him, first time she’d looked him in the face since she came in, and she said: “If I could only go to sleep and stay where it’s dark, and never hear any more talk, and never look at any more faces.” She stopped short, and then added one thing more: “And never answer another question.”

She reached into her pocket and brought out a flat leather cigarette case, and snapped it open. Danny started to jump for a match, but then he sat back again. It could be that having people jump to light cigarettes for you is the same as having to look at faces and hear talk and answer questions, and perhaps if a man could get to know what’s wanted and what isn’t, he might be better thought of.

She felt in both coat pockets, and then found a card of matches in the pocket of her sweater, lighted her cigarette, and held onto the burnt match. She was very nice to see, slumped there on the couch, with her coat collar turned up around her neck, and a cigarette in her mouth and the dead match between her fingers.

“You do look sort of shot,” Danny said. “Did you *have* to work? Couldn’t you have told her you were sick, and gone home and got some sleep?”

“No, that’s something I couldn’t have told her.”

“You’re too conscientious. You’ll never get anywhere.”

“I’m not conscientious, I’m just healthy, and . . .”

"And what?"

"And everybody knows I'm healthy. So it wouldn't do to play sick, that's all."

"Healthy people get sick. You just told me you felt sick. Doesn't your friend Renée ever get sick?"

The girl answered this with a little heat. "She's always sick."

"She doesn't look it," Danny said. "Something I used to wonder about her," he said. "Is she all French? Where's she get that color?"

"Sun lamp," the girl said. "She works very hard on herself."

She felt the end of the match and then put it into her pocket. The ash tray was on the desk, and Danny didn't bring it to her, and she didn't go get it, and so they both seemed calm. They sat silent for a while, and the girl began to look as if she wouldn't bolt. She looked as if she would stay right where she was and think whatever her thoughts were for a long time, and maybe in the end stay even longer. Right now she was lost, submerged, thinking whatever it was. Her face was gray and her eyelids were blue, and her hair hung in a full light sweep across her cheek; and Danny sat across the room from her and watched her without making any point of it. After a while he went into the kitchen and lighted the oven and put the coffee on top of the stove.

"I'm going to heat the coffee," he said. "Same coffee we didn't drink last night."

"It ought to be aged by now," the girl said. She said it dully, but it was a sign she'd stay and drink it.

"Do you want sugar?" he said. "There isn't any cream."

"Neither," she said, and that brought him to the door to say some of the things he'd been thinking.

"What I like about this," he said, "is that I don't know anything about you—when your birthday is, or what your middle name is, or what size shoes you wear, or whether you're rich or poor. Most people find out all those things, and dawdle along and if everything checks up then they go ahead."

He was getting cups and saucers out of the cupboard, and he dropped a saucer and kicked the pieces under the sink.

"All right, then, break," he said to the saucer, and to the girl

he said, "but us, we go ahead first, and then go back over the rest of the stuff at our leisure."

He looked around the door to see how she was taking it, and she had her hands over her face again.

"Today's the best day I ever had in my life," he said, so quietly that she could hear it or not, just as she pleased. "Hear me or not. I've felt good today, like chinning myself on the damned pipes."

It got through to her. "That's because you're not me," she said. She looked up and smiled about half and then looked down again and said, "And don't ever get yourself in a spot where you have to feel like this, because it's the hell, I'm telling you. Keep yourself out in the open, stay free, and—" Her voice wobbled, and then she pulled it together and looked across at Danny and said, "Go chin yourself."

The whole thing was good news and Danny snatched at it.

"You mean," he said, "that's all it is that's got you down? Nothing but that?"

"Nothing but what? I didn't say anything had me down. I'm sick, that's all." She said it all fast, with her guard up.

"Why didn't you say all this before, and not keep me wondering how I stand?"

He left the coffeepot where it was and came toward the couch. "Look, you," he said. "This way it's easy. If some other bastard thinks you're his girl, and you don't want to tell him about me, that's all right, take it very easy. I'll tell him myself."

The girl stared at him and licked her lips the way people do when there isn't anything to say.

Danny didn't see how scared she was; he was too happy.

"Then it will all be done, and it will all be straight, and it won't bother him for long. That's a fact. It won't. Figure it out for yourself, how would you feel yourself?"

"Forget it," she said. "Please let's forget it. I've got to go."

"No, you don't. I've poured your coffee."

He went back to the kitchen and brought one cup in a saucer and carried the other cup, saucerless, by the handle.

"Here you are."

She took it and laid her cigarette on the edge of the saucer,

and her hand shook so that the cup clicked like a train on a track.

“Drink it.”

She raised the cup, and the cigarette rolled down to the center of the saucer, and when she set the cup down it tipped, and a little coffee spilled over and put out the cigarette.

“God,” she said, “what a mess. What can I do?”

“Here,” Danny said, “give it to me,” and he took the cup and saucer to the kitchen, threw away the cigarette and washed and dried the saucer, and set the cup back in it and filled it up and brought it back and handed it to her. Then he lighted a cigarette, laid it on the edge of the ash tray, and set the ash tray down on the couch beside her.

“See?” Danny said. “I’m very crazy about you, only I don’t want to tell you now. Here’s what we’ll do. You drink that, and I’ll go put on some pants and a shirt, and you tell me what the name of this guy is, and I’ll go tell him how it was, and you wait here for me, and then I’ll come back, and we’ll go to sleep. And tomorrow when we wake up, if we ever do, it will all be fixed and you won’t be jumpy and we’ll get up and have breakfast and walk around the lake.”

He looked down at her. “Is it somebody I already know?”

She waited a moment with the cup up to her lips, and then set it down on the couch and picked up the cigarette and stood up.

“No,” she said. “It isn’t anybody at all. It isn’t anyone.”

Danny was between her and the door. She saw how it was, and then put the cigarette in her mouth and pulled a pair of gloves out of her pocket and put them on. It was to say she was leaving, she was getting out, she was not stopping to drink any more coffee or say any more words. She would have to walk around Danny and go to the door and open it, and then get through all those furnaces in the basement and find the door to the outside. It could be done. It could be done as easily as jumping four feet from the roof of one building to the roof of another building. Four feet is no distance, one way you think about it.

“Good-by.” She said it flatly, without looking, and Danny

came up to her and said, "Huh uh, no, you don't just go out of here without saying anything. You don't do that, not to me. Whoever this is we can tell him how it is."

"No, we can't," the girl said.

"Why can't we?"

"Because we can't. This can't be fixed. Could you maybe take my word for it and let me alone?"

"You said it wasn't anybody."

"It isn't anybody."

"Then what is it?"

Janet Black was out on a limb, and there wasn't any safe way to solid ground, so she tried to stay where she was.

"I came here tonight," she said, "because I wanted to see you, this one time. That's all. It was the wrong thing to do, of course. But I thought maybe I could come in and tell you how it was and you'd be willing to let it go at that, and not set up a holler and shove me around."

She pushed her hair back from her cheek, and she looked as tired as anyone ever looked.

"I thought maybe we could just be quiet for a while, without questions and answers, and then I'd go."

She stepped back, not steady, and Danny caught her; and then she slumped and he held her and she let him.

"Hell, I didn't know I was asking questions," Danny said to her. "I'm thick-headed, that's all. I won't ask you anything, don't even think about it. No questions, no questions."

He looked down at her and said it. "No questions from me to you, did you hear me?"

"I heard you."

"Will it be all right, if I keep my silly trap shut and don't ever ask anything?"

She didn't answer, and he went on. "See, I don't give a damn. All I wanted to do was to fix it for you so we could be together and you could stay. But look, if you'd rather fix it yourself and not have me pushing in, well, go ahead and fix it. That's all I want. Only get it straight about me, I'm with you. It doesn't matter whether I know what I'm with you on or not, but I'm

with you. As long as you live, whatever you do, you're my girl and I'm with you. Is that all clear? Is that nice?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Would you rather get married, or not get married?"

She started to cry then, and she didn't like to cry. She pushed herself away from him and kicked down at the floor.

"What's the matter?"

She didn't say, because she was trying to quit crying.

"Don't burn your glove." The cigarette was down to a half inch, and Danny took hold of the girl's hand and turned it over and took the cigarette out from between her fingers and put it into the ash tray.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"Why don't I just go out the window, the way I came in?"

"Do you have to go?"

"Yes." She looked at her watch. "It's a quarter past twelve."

"Does it matter?"

"Yes."

She went toward the window, and took a look at the nail. Danny went with her and untwisted the cord and started pushing the nail back and forth.

"I can get it out," he said. "It's not in very deep."

He wiggled the nail back and forth and made his voice sound casual. "You coming back?"

"I can't," the girl said.

"Where you going?"

"Now? I'm going back to my room and go to sleep."

"Stay here then."

"You said you'd let me alone."

"All right, all right. O.K., I will. Look, why don't I walk over with you?"

"It's only a block. Why should you?"

"Because I want to. I'll get dressed."

"No. I want to go right now."

"I'll just put on some shoes and a coat."

"I don't want you to go with me." It was a flat statement: I do not want you to go with me, I do not want you, and it

quieted Danny Blake the way a knife in the heart can quiet.

It was a shut-out and he didn't try again. He got the nail out, and let the blind go up, and then put up the window.

"There you are," he said. "Take it away."

She didn't try anything either. She took hold of the window sill with both hands, and jumped up and got one knee on it, like a swimmer coming out of a tank, and then ducked her head and got out. She sat on the sidewalk and Danny looked out at her. One side of her face was lighted from the street light on the corner. Her coat collar and her face looked the same color, and her hair looked white. Danny put the window down and they looked at each other through the glass. There was no expression on either of their faces, not love or hate. When the girl started to get up, Danny drew the blind. He must have stood there and held it down. There wasn't any nail.

Janet Black started to walk. Her coat collar was turned up and she kept her hands in her pockets and moved slowly down the street. It was only a block to the boarding house where she had a room, but when she got to the house she didn't go in. She stood in front of it a minute, and looked up at it, like a sight-seer taking a look at a public building, and then she turned away and moved again in another direction. There were some things she had to do, and now she moved again, slowly and smoothly, almost as if she were standing on an endless belt, just standing there and letting herself be pulled along with it. And all the time words kept coming at her, pushing up to her and making themselves heard. They were all words that had been put into her mind at one time or another, and now they were all on their own, and they shot up at her in little spurts, all unconnected. It didn't make much difference whose they were, her own or other people's old words. All she did was move along on the endless belt and hear direct quotations unconnected. She didn't resist; she let them come as they would.

"Choices, I said, 'simple choices, that's all. Nothing but simple choices.' Look here, don't mix yourself up about it, because it's this way. This is the way it is, and has to be, and I'm with you. You know that. I'm with you. I don't even know

what I'm with you on, but my country right or wrong. 'You don't know this,' I said, 'and I trust it won't come as a shock to you, oh, I do trust. But the thing about it is that I have decided to marry a man named Daniel, in fact, no, no, nothing. If you really want to know where I've been, I'll tell you. I've been to the public library, and that's God's holy truth. Nothing. No, forget it, forget I mentioned it, it's only a piece of old American folk humor, and it has absolutely nothing to do with the famed French clarity, and still less with the bleary stone so dear to the heart of every loyal Irish. Very well, then, Blarney, I can be accurate. I can check my references with the best of them. No, I absolutely insist on correcting it. It was a stupid mistake. I was under the impression I'd said Blarney all along. And I'll never go near the public library again, never. I hate a scene as much as the next one, as I was remarking just now.' Oh, I do hate them, especially if I'm in them. A good fight, now, is something else. A good fight is better, only may the best man win, which to my knowledge is not in the cards. You talk like a rummy, all loose and freely associational, but it probably is just some sort of mental disorder; there are mental disorders, which will have to remain nameless because my memory for names seems to be slipping, but there are ones that take the victim like this exactly. The victim hears talk. A pertinent example is Jeanne d'Arc, *la vierge d'Orléans*, of whom you think so highly. And anybody, I don't care who, can go this way and hear voices in the head if there's a reason for it, if enough pressure has been put on for a long enough time. That's why innocent men say all right, I did it, after they've been kept awake for sixty hours and put under a light every time they start to sleep. That's me, every time I nod my head you hit me with a scene, fast talk, fancy words, diatribe. But do you know something? Do you know I could stand up and say look, I've had enough of this. This isn't the way it started out to be. This affair was something else, now it's what shall I say? Is there a word bad enough to say what it has become? It has become an incest, a closeness, an airlessness. It's a tube, a rubber tube, and I'm inside it and both ends are sewed up, and there I am. No, it's worse than that; there we both are.

Whew. Whew. But what *we* did, we got up and walked around the lake. No, first we had breakfast, and I looked at this man and I said to him, Daniel, I don't care if school keeps or not, it's so nice to know that we'll be out there walking around the lake, just kicking around loose in the open air, right or wrong. Keep in a cool dry place."

The university campus split the town into two parts. The book stores and clothing stores and restaurants and students' dormitories and boarding houses were on one side, on the level; and on the other side, up the hill, were the homes and gardens, and clubs, and two-car garages. At the edge of the campus, on the lower side, the girl ducked between the bars of a fence and took a little path through an open field. It was the shortest way to the main road that crossed the campus, and when she got to the main one she shuffled her feet along the gravel walk and got the mud off her shoes. Halfway across she came to a circle, heavily landscaped, with a fountain and a pool, drained now, and a ring of concrete benches around it. It was a bright night with a late, misshapen moon riding high, and Janet Black stopped a minute and put a knee on one of the benches and looked over the back of it at the statue above the fountain. It was Pan, naked and dull, playing a set of pipes, and below him the pool was full of moldy leaves.

That was the last time she stopped. The words kept going all the time: "I hope you may be able to understand this. Don't try to stop me, or talk me away from it, because it's what I'm going to do. No, I don't care what you say or who you tell. I'm not afraid. Scarcely at all am I afraid. And words to that effect. I'll just take my things and leave, and that will be done. Wouldn't you think, wouldn't you think if I said it and took my things and left, that that would be all? Tonight, even. Because that's what I'd most certainly think. If ever, this night."

She kept her head down and moved along the gravel walk past the library, and past the administration building, and past the law building, and then she was out in the open again. She took another cut away from the walk and came out at the foot of Amherst Avenue. The big apartment house was at the end of the street and it shone up there on this bright night, all glass

and metal with a round front. All the way up there, a fine example of the future trend in modern architecture, a most forward-looking edifice. And if one wanted to ask the opinion of Daniel Blake, all it needed was some neon.

When the girl got to the door, she pulled a key ring out of her pocket, found a key, and put it in the lock. Inside, the hall was bare and immaculate. There were big black-and-white tiles on the floor, a checkerboard of squares two feet across, and the walls were soft and pinkish with side lights made of fan-shaped layers of frosted glass. The girl walked across the squares and put her feet, by habit, only into the black ones. The elevator was at the end of the hall, and she slid the door back and stepped inside. It was a narrow little box with aluminum walls and a checkered floor and a panel with a row of five pearl buttons on it. She pushed the fourth one and the current came on and the elevator got itself started. Four floors of it, and the girl turned down her coat collar, and pushed her hair back and took off her gloves, and then the elevator died, suddenly but smoothly, and she hunched her shoulders under her coat, and slid the door back and got out.

The hall was like the other one: checkered floor and pink walls and frosted lights. She walked herself down the black squares to the end of the hall and stood for a moment in front of a door. Then she found another key and put it into the lock and opened the door.

It was dark inside, and very warm. The girl closed the door and put her back against it and stood quietly a moment, waiting. There was a light in an inner room, and the door was not quite closed, and the girl stood and waited, shivering.

Then the voice came. It was a clear cold voice, but rich, like the voice of an actress or a drinker. It made itself sound careless, and the words were:

*“Ah, tu es enfin de retour?”*

Nothing but that, and the girl stiffened up, there in the dark, and knew this was the time to say what she had to say. It had to be now, right now, and she tried to open her mouth and her teeth were clamped. She swallowed and pushed her

hair back and tried again, but she knew she didn't have it, and that she never would be able to get it said. The question had come to her carelessly, and she sat down in the dark and answered it tonelessly:

“Yes, I'm back.”

# *Lappin and Lapinova*

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by VIRGINIA WOOLF

THEY were married. The wedding march pealed out. The pigeons fluttered. Small boys in Eton jackets threw rice; a fox terrier sauntered across the path; and Ernest Thorburn led his bride to the car through that small inquisitive crowd of complete strangers which always collects in London to enjoy other people's happiness or unhappiness. Certainly he looked handsome and she looked shy. More rice was thrown, and the car moved off.

That was on Tuesday. Now it was Saturday. Rosalind had still to get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Thorburn. Perhaps she never would get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Anybody, she thought, as she sat in the bow window of the hotel looking over the lake to the mountains, and waited for her husband to come down to breakfast. Ernest was a difficult name to get used to. It was not the name she would have chosen. She would have preferred Timothy, Antony, or Peter. He did not look like Ernest either. The name suggested the Albert Memorial, mahogany sideboards, steel engravings of the Prince Consort with his family—her mother-in-law's dining room in Porchester Terrace in short.

But here he was. Thank goodness he did not look like Ernest—no. But what did he look like? She glanced at him sideways. Well, when he was eating toast he looked like a rabbit. Not that anyone else would have seen a likeness to a creature so diminutive and timid in this spruce, muscular young man with the straight nose, the blue eyes, and the very firm mouth. But that made it all the more amusing. His nose twitched very slightly when he ate. So did her pet rabbit's. She kept watching

his nose twitch; and then she had to explain, when he caught her looking at him, why she laughed.

"It's because you're like a rabbit, Ernest," she said. "Like a wild rabbit," she added, looking at him. "A hunting rabbit; a King Rabbit; a rabbit that makes laws for all the other rabbits."

Ernest had no objection to being that kind of rabbit, and since it amused her to see him twitch his nose—he had never known that his nose twitched—he twitched it on purpose. And she laughed and laughed; and he laughed too, so that the maiden ladies and the fishing man and the Swiss waiter in his greasy black jacket all guessed right; they were very happy. But how long does such happiness last? they asked themselves; and each answered according to his own circumstances.

At lunch time, seated on a clump of heather beside the lake, "Lettuce, rabbit?" said Rosalind, holding out the lettuce that had been provided to eat with the hard-boiled eggs. "Come and take it out of my hand," she added, and he stretched out and nibbled the lettuce and twitched his nose.

"Good rabbit, nice rabbit," she said, patting him, as she used to pat her tame rabbit at home. But that was absurd. He was not a tame rabbit, whatever he was. She turned it into French. "Lapin," she called him. But whatever he was, he was not a French rabbit. He was simply and solely English—born at Porchester Terrace, educated at Rugby; now a clerk in His Majesty's Civil Service. So she tried "Bunny" next; but that was worse. "Bunny" was someone plump and soft and comic; he was thin and hard and serious. Still, his nose twitched. "Lappin," she exclaimed suddenly; and gave a little cry as if she had found the very word she looked for.

"Lappin, Lappin, King Lappin," she repeated. It seemed to suit him exactly; he was not Ernest, he was King Lappin. Why? She did not know.

When there was nothing new to talk about on their long solitary walks—and it rained, as everyone had warned them that it would rain; or when they were sitting over the fire in the evening, for it was cold, and the maiden ladies had gone and the fishing man, and the waiter only came if you rang the bell for him, she let her fancy play with the story of the Lappin

tribe. Under her hands—she was sewing; he was reading—they became very real, very vivid, very amusing. Ernest put down the paper and helped her. There were the black rabbits and the red; there were the enemy rabbits and the friendly. There were the wood in which they lived and the outlying prairies and the swamp. Above all there was King Lappin, who, far from having only the one trick—that he twitched his nose—became as the days passed an animal of the greatest character; Rosalind was always finding new qualities in him. But above all he was a great hunter.

“And what,” said Rosalind, on the last day of the honeymoon, “did the King do today?”

In fact they had been climbing all day; and she had worn a blister on her heel; but she did not mean that.

“Today,” said Ernest, twitching his nose as he bit the end off his cigar, “he chased a hare.” He paused; struck a match, and twitched again.

“A woman hare,” he added.

“A white hare!” Rosalind exclaimed, as if she had been expecting this. “Rather a small hare; silver gray; with big bright eyes?”

“Yes,” said Ernest, looking at her as she had looked at him, “a smallish animal; with eyes popping out of her head, and two little front paws dangling.” It was exactly how she sat, with her sewing dangling in her hands; and her eyes, that were so big and bright, were certainly a little prominent.

“Ah, Lapinova,” Rosalind murmured.

“Is that what she’s called?” said Ernest—“the real Rosalind?” He looked at her. He felt very much in love with her.

“Yes; that’s what she’s called,” said Rosalind. “Lapinova.” And before they went to bed that night it was all settled. He was King Lappin; she was Queen Lapinova. They were the very opposite of each other; he was bold and determined; she wary and undependable. He ruled over the busy world of rabbits; her world was a desolate, mysterious place, which she ranged mostly by moonlight. All the same, their territories touched; they were King and Queen.

Thus when they came back from their honeymoon they pos-

sessed a private world, inhabited, save for the one white hare, entirely by rabbits. No one guessed that there was such a place, and that of course made it all the more amusing. It made them feel, more even than most young married couples, in league together against the rest of the world. Often they looked slyly at each other when people talked about rabbits and woods and traps and shooting. Or they winked furtively across the table when Aunt Mary said that she could never bear to see a hare in a dish—it looked so like a baby; or when John, Ernest's sporting brother, told them what price rabbits were fetching that autumn in Wiltshire, skins and all. Sometimes when they wanted a gamekeeper, or a poacher, or a Lord of the Manor, they amused themselves by distributing the parts among their friends. Ernest's mother, Mrs. Reginald Thorburn, for example, fitted the part of the Squire to perfection. But it was all secret—that was the point of it; nobody save themselves knew that such a world existed.

Without that world, how, Rosalind wondered that winter, could she have lived at all? For instance, there was the golden-wedding party, when all the Thorburns assembled at Porchester Terrace to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of that union which had been so blessed—had it not produced Ernest Thorburn? and so fruitful—had it not produced nine other sons and daughters into the bargain, many themselves married and also fruitful? She dreaded that party. But it was inevitable. As she walked upstairs she felt bitterly that she was an only child and an orphan at that; a mere drop among all those Thorburns assembled in the great drawing room with the shiny satin wallpaper and the lustrous family portraits. The living Thorburns much resembled the painted; save that instead of painted lips they had real lips; out of which came jokes; jokes about school-rooms, and how they had pulled the chair from under the governess; jokes about frogs and how they had put them between the virgin sheets of maiden ladies. As for herself, she had never even made an apple-pie bed. Holding her present in her hand she advanced toward her mother-in-law sumptuous in yellow

satin; and toward her father-in-law decorated with a rich yellow carnation. All round them on tables and chairs there were golden tributes, some nestling in cotton wool; others branching resplendent—candlesticks, cigar boxes, chains, each stamped with the goldsmith's proof that it was solid gold, hall-marked, authentic. But her present was only a little pinchbeck box pierced with holes; an old sand caster, an eighteenth-century relic, once used to sprinkle sand over wet ink. Rather a senseless present she felt—in an age of blotting paper; and as she proffered it, she saw in front of her the stubby black handwriting in which her mother-in-law when they were engaged had expressed the hope that "my son will make you happy." No, she was not happy. Not at all happy. She looked at Ernest, straight as a ramrod with a nose like all the noses in the family portraits; a nose that never twitched at all.

Then they went down to dinner. She was half hidden by the great chrysanthemums that curled their red and gold petals into large tight balls. Everything was gold. A gold-edged card with gold initials intertwined recited the list of all the dishes that would be set one after another before them. She dipped her spoon in a plate of clear golden fluid. The raw white fog outside had been turned by the lamps into a golden mesh that blurred the edges of the plates and gave the pineapples a rough golden skin. Only she herself in her white wedding dress peering ahead of her with her prominent eyes seemed insoluble as an icicle.

As the dinner wore on, however, the room grew steamy with heat. Beads of perspiration stood out on the men's foreheads. She felt that her icicle was being turned to water. She was being melted; dispersed; dissolved into nothingness; and would soon faint. Then through the surge in her head and the din in her ears she heard a woman's voice exclaim, "But they breed so!"

The Thorburns—yes; they breed so, she echoed, looking at all the round red faces that seemed doubled in the giddiness that overcame her and magnified in the gold mist that enhaloed them. "They breed so." Then John bawled:

"Little devils! . . . Shoot 'em! Jump on 'em with big boots!  
That's the only way to deal with 'em . . . rabbits!"

At that word, that magic word, she revived. Peeping between the chrysanthemums she saw Ernest's nose twitch. It rippled, it ran with successive twitches. And at that a mysterious catastrophe befell the Thorburns. The golden table became a moor with the gorse in full bloom; the din of voices turned to one peal of lark's laughter ringing down from the sky. It was a blue sky—clouds passed slowly. And they had all been changed—the Thorburns. She looked at her father-in-law, a furtive little man with dyed mustaches. His foible was collecting things—seals, enamel boxes, trifles from eighteenth-century dressing tables which he hid in the drawers of his study from his wife. Now she saw him as he was—a poacher, stealing off with his coat bulging with pheasants and partridges to drop them stealthily into a three-legged pot in his smoky little cottage. That was her real father-in-law—a poacher. And Celia, the unmarried daughter, who always nosed out other people's secrets, the little things they wished to hide—she was a white ferret with pink eyes and a nose clotted with earth from her horrid underground nosings and pokings. Slung round men's shoulders, in a net, and thrust down a hole—it was a pitiable life—Celia's; it was none of her fault. So she saw Celia. And then she looked at her mother-in-law—whom they dubbed the Squire.Flushed, coarse, a bully—she was all that, as she stood returning thanks, but now that Rosalind—that is Lapinova—saw her, she saw behind her the decayed family mansion, the plaster peeling off the walls, and heard her, with a sob in her voice, giving thanks to her children (who hated her) for a world that had ceased to exist. There was a sudden silence. They all stood with their glasses raised; they all drank; then it was over.

"Oh, King Lappin!" she cried as they went home together in the fog, "if your nose hadn't twitched just at that moment, I should have been trapped!"

"But you're safe," said King Lappin, pressing her paw.

"Quite safe," she answered.

And they drove back through the Park, King and Queen of the marsh, of the mist, and of the gorse-scented moor.

Thus time passed; one year; two years of time. And on a winter's night, which happened by a coincidence to be the anniversary of the golden-wedding party—but Mrs. Reginald Thorburn was dead; the house was to let; and there was only a caretaker in residence—Ernest came home from the office. They had a nice little home; half a house above a saddler's shop in South Kensington, not far from the tube station. It was cold, with fog in the air, and Rosalind was sitting over the fire, sewing.

“What d'you think happened to me today?” she began as soon as he had settled himself down with his legs stretched to the blaze. “I was crossing the stream when—”

“What stream?” Ernest interrupted her.

“The stream at the bottom, where our wood meets the black wood,” she explained.

Ernest looked completely blank for a moment.

“What the deuce are you talking about?” he asked.

“My dear Ernest!” she cried in dismay. “King Lappin,” she added, dangling her little front paws in the firelight. But his nose did not twitch. Her hands—they turned to hands—clutched the stuff she was holding; her eyes popped half out of her head. It took him five minutes at least to change from Ernest Thorburn to King Lappin; and while she waited she felt a load on the back of her neck, as if somebody were about to wring it. At last he changed to King Lappin; his nose twitched; and they spent the evening roaming the woods much as usual.

But she slept badly. In the middle of the night she woke, feeling as if something strange had happened to her. She was stiff and cold. At last she turned on the light and looked at Ernest lying beside her. He was sound asleep. He snored. But even though he snored, his nose remained perfectly still. It looked as if it had never twitched at all. Was it possible that he was really Ernest; and that she was really married to Ernest? A vision of her mother-in-law's dining room came before her; and there they sat, she and Ernest, grown old, under the engravings, in front of the sideboard. . . . It was their golden-wedding day. She could not bear it.

“Lappin, King Lappin!” she whispered, and for a moment

his nose seemed to twitch of its own accord. But he still slept. "Wake up, Lappin, wake up!" she cried.

Ernest woke; and seeing her sitting bolt upright beside him he asked:

"What's the matter?"

"I thought my rabbit was dead!" she whimpered. Ernest was angry.

"Don't talk such rubbish, Rosalind," he said. "Lie down and go to sleep."

He turned over. In another moment he was sound asleep and snoring.

But she could not sleep. She lay curled up on her side of the bed, like a hare in its form. She had turned out the light, but the street lamp lit the ceiling faintly, and the trees outside made a lacy network over it as if there were a shadowy grove on the ceiling in which she wandered, turning, twisting, in and out, round and round, hunting, being hunted, hearing the bay of hounds and horns; flying, escaping . . . until the maid drew the blinds and brought their early tea.

Next day she could settle to nothing. She seemed to have lost something. She felt as if her body had shrunk; it had grown small, and black and hard. Her joints seemed stiff too, and when she looked in the glass, which she did several times as she wandered about the flat, her eyes seemed to burst out of her head, like currants in a bun. The rooms also seemed to have shrunk. Large pieces of furniture jutted out at odd angles and she found herself knocking against them. At last she put on her hat and went out. She walked along the Cromwell Road; and every room she passed and peered into seemed to be a dining room where people sat eating under steel engravings, with thick yellow lace curtains and mahogany sideboards. At last she reached the Natural History Museum; she used to like it when she was a child. But the first thing she saw when she went in was a stuffed hare standing on sham snow with pink glass eyes. Somehow it made her shiver all over. Perhaps it would be better when dusk fell. She went home and sat over the fire, without a light, and tried to imagine that she was out alone on a moor; and there was a stream rushing; and beyond the

stream a dark wood. But she could get no further than the stream. At last she squatted down on the bank on the wet grass, and sat crouched in her chair, with her hands dangling empty, and her eyes glazed, like glass eyes, in the firelight. Then there was the crack of a gun. . . . She started as if she had been shot. It was only Ernest, turning his key in the door. She waited, trembling. He came in and switched on the light. There he stood tall, handsome, rubbing his hands that were red with cold.

“Sitting in the dark?” he said.

“Oh, Ernest, Ernest!” she cried, starting up in her chair.

“Well, what’s up, now?” he asked briskly, warming his hands at the fire.

“It’s Lapinova . . . ,” she faltered, glancing wildly at him out of her great startled eyes. “She’s gone, Ernest. I’ve lost her!”

Ernest frowned. He pressed his lips tight together. “Oh, that’s what’s up, is it?” he said, smiling rather grimly at his wife. For ten seconds he stood there, silent; and she waited, feeling hands tightening at the back of her neck.

“Yes,” he said at length. “Poor Lapinova. . . .” He straightened his tie at the looking glass over the mantelpiece.

“Caught in a trap,” he said, “killed,” and sat down and read the newspaper.

So that was the end of that marriage.

# Slews of Love

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by HELEN HOWE

*Radnor, Pa.*

*June 10, 1941*

WELL, Phyl me gal, haven't I gone and fooled you all? Ye blushing bride in your midst! Having passed my thirtieth birthday I'm sure no one ever thought I'd take the Fatal Plunge, but I've been and gone and done it!!!

Jim and I have only been back from England two days. We were weeks later in getting home than we had expected and you can't believe how superangelic all my friends have been. I mean when we arrived we could hardly sit down, the living room was so full of boxes bursting with presents, and as for telegrams and letters, they were blossoming like the flowers that bloom in the spring tra la. Ma, like the angel she is, after she got my cable telling her the knot was tied, had the stone farmhouse done over and it makes a really adorable honeymoon cot!

Not that I expect anything approaching a real honeymoon, because, as you may have gathered, I've married a celebrity, and you can't imagine what that means. We were met on the dock by an army of reporters, and before I could even walk down the gangplank to see the family—weren't they all lambs to be there, Ma, Pa, Franzie, Pollsie, and Nellsie?—we had to have thousands of flashlight pictures taken, and Jim had to answer umpteen questions on the "situation." You probably saw our pictures spread over the front pages of all the newspapers the next morning with great ballyhoo about "War Romance"!

Then came the meeting of the family. Jim says he still can't keep all us redheads straight. Then he had to rush off to a luncheon given in his honor by the Advertisers' Club, where they got him to promise to do some special articles on "The England I Saw." Later he was interviewed by Lowell Thomas on the air.

And now I'm knee-deep in his fan mail, which I answer for him. It was thrilling, on getting back, to find *These Were Not Men* still on the best-seller list, along with *This Above All* and *The White Cliffs*. Being away he'd missed most of the reviews. Did you see that William Lyon Phelps said Jim's book is sure to become as great a classic as Zola's *J'Accuse*—which has puffed *my* chest out another inch, though Jim himself is too modest to do more than smile.

And now I've written all this without even thanking you for that door stopper. Honestly I let out a whoop when I opened it. It's the most perfect scottie I ever saw, and Bet actually growled at it, believe it or not! I'm going right on with my collection, marriage or no marriage. I think Jim must have thought he had a madwoman for a wife when he saw the mantelpiece in our bedroom simply swarming with scotties of every size and description! Quite aside from Bounce and Bet in the flesh. They simply can't figure out what a perfectly strange man is doing in my bedroom, not to mention what they consider to be *their* bed!!!! They refuse to stay in their baskets, as I hoped I could induce them to do, but curl up at our feet, which, as Jim sourly remarks every night, makes things rather thick! Poor darling—for years he was devoted to a very well-trained huge *man's* dog who slept in the cellar. Now he's got to get used to dark-blue sheets—because the pups get white ones in such a state—and his best London suit is covered with hair, and I guess he's wondering what he's got into!!!

Everybody asks what Jim thinks about the "situation," so you're in good company. He feels sure that Germany and Russia won't fight. Rather depressing, isn't it? The news about the *Robin Moor* I should think might be the beginning of real shooting for us—but that's only what I think, and who cares about that?!

Thanks again for your letter, which was darling, and the simply swell present. If you can ever leave Pittsburgh, and Joe and the brats, you must come and meet my Better Half. I want to show him off to all good Bryn Mawrters of ye good old class of '32. I know you'll adore him. Everyone does.

Loads of love,  
Briggsy

P.S. Though married, I can't change my name after so many years!

Radnor, Pa.  
June 25, 1941

Dear Gag,

Those bathroom scales are just what I needed. In fact, I put them into practice immediately and I let out such a howl at the result that Jim came rushing to my rescue, thinking I'd slipped in the bathtub! I have gained *ten* pounds since we were married, but Jim says he doesn't mind, and that he doesn't like skinny women. (His first wife was skinny, said she cattily.) He says that strong people—he's too polite to say *plump* people!!—are apt to be happy, and it's nice to have someone around who's happy. He reminds me sometimes of Ma when she used to have those sick headaches—they came from nothing but nerves—who always said she liked to have me with her, to swab her head with 4711, darken the room, etc., because there was something very soothing in being looked after by a complete *extrovert!* In fact, I seem to be the solution for anyone suffering from the artist's temperament, which my darling Jim does more than most!

I was sorry you didn't turn up for the garden party. I certainly felt I had brought 'em back alive, as Jim was THE lion of the day. I'm hoping he'll remember the names of half my friends he met, because there'll be hurt feelings if he doesn't. He kicked like a steer at the idea of being exhibited, but I told him Bryn Mawr College was unable to hold its garden party every year without a hundred per cent attendance of Briggses and all their heirs and assigns—not to mention sons-in-law. Especially this year, with Boots graduating—can you *believe* that Pollsie is the mother of anything old enough to

graduate?—it would have been dreadful not to be there en masse. So he put on a dark-blue suit and drank punch and sweated and mopped his forehead and his glasses and suffered, along with all the other men. Except, in his case, he gave Boots the thrill of her young life in showing off to her little senior friends her brand-new, world-famous UNCLE!

It's going to do Jim a world of good being in a big family because, poor lamb, he's never had anything like it. He just can't get over what fun we all have together. He says, "What *can* you find to laugh at like that with your own sisters?" But I tell him he doesn't know the Briggs girls!!! I think one reason it's harder for him to be very cheerio these days is because being a commentator he knows all the terrible things that are going on everywhere.

I thought a little change of scene might be a good thing, so we went over to New York for a spree last week. We went to *Pal Joey* and *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. Golly, it was good to see an American play again. But Jim says being in New York for more than twenty-four hours gives him the heebie-jeebies, so we didn't stay as long as I should have liked, and I literally didn't have a sec in which to call you.

Thanks again, Gag, for the scales, and stacks of love,

Briggsy

P.S. You and Henry must come over to dinner soon. Remember we're not really far from New York, and I'm sure Henry and Jim would get on beautifully, as they would have baseball in common! Jim isn't a *bit* like the typical writer. All my brothers-in-law, I think, were convinced he'd sort of stalk around tearing his hair and what not, but they get on simply marvelously, in spite of the fact that one is an investment counselor, one a banker, and one a bond salesman—so Henry needn't worry about having to cope with a high-brow!!

P.P.S. I forgot to answer your question about Jim's political views. He thinks Japan is so uneasy over Hitler's attack on Russia that they are bound to play ball with Great Britain and us. So that's one place we can relax!

Radnor, Pa.

July 3, 1941

Dear Bug,

Gosh, those candlesticks are knockout! And exactly what I needed. My dear, I've had six salt cellars, said she ungratefully, and not one solitary candlestick. So you can see just how exactly you hit the nail on the thumb.

So you want all the "gory details" about how Jim and I met in London, etc. It began really with Ophelia—Ophelia being my Baby Austin, whose whole name is Ophelia Bumps! I used to take her out of London on week-ends and, having met Jim, thought he might like the chance of getting out of town too, which he very definitely did. Did you ever know the family's great friends, Lord and Lady Sulgrave (I call them Aunt and Uncle and simply worship them)? Well, anyway, they let me treat Fernley like my own house, and I took Jim there a lot, which he loved. I could see he was going through a hell of a time over something, and I sympathized with him a lot—you know how I love anyone who's a little down on their luck that I can more or less take in hand!—and so I sort of tried to cheer him up, and got him to fix Ophelia's insides, which were on the blink, and one thing and another, and the first thing we knew it seemed a swell idea to get married!

But even after we got engaged I still couldn't make him shake off his blues completely. In fact, Bug, I've married a complete New Englander who is eaten alive by his *conscience!* The poor lamb kept turning his divorce over and over in his mind, wondering if by any chance any of the blame was his. Honestly, I could just have killed some silly old psychoanalyst who got hold of him—those people give me the *creeps* anyway—who told Jim he thought he had shown "lack of co-operation," which simply didn't make sense, as his wife was a famous all-time bitch who had lovers right under his nose and everything, and, anyway, it was *she* who marched off to Reno and divorced *him!*

I have said to Jim I don't know how many times, "It isn't as though you had fallen in love with me, Jimbo-Jumbo, while you were still married to her. I suppose maybe your wife might have some right to blame you then."

I only wish he had some nice hobby which would help him to relax. He simply digs his heels in when I take him out to the Rowdy Room in the barn, and refuses to play ping-pong or anything. The great disappointment in the family is that he doesn't know one note of music from the other. I'm afraid he isn't going to get much fun out of the weekly Sunday get-together of the Choral Club which we always have in the barn, with cider and doughnuts and Uncle Robert practically having apoplexy conducting us. Jim whispered to me the first time, "Is it necessary for your uncle in order to conduct a Brahms Requiem to wear sneakers?" But he just doesn't know Uncle Robert!

Hope all goes well with the Book Shoppe and that you're still keeping up the good work by swimming at the "Y." But honestly, Bug, you don't know what life can be until you're married. How about it??! said she tactfully.

From ONE WHO KNOWS—your loving,

Briggsy

Radnor, Pa.  
July 3, 1941

Dearest Aunty Kay,

That new Omega enlarger you and Uncle Warren sent me is absolutely swellegent. Hereafter there is no excuse if my Leica doesn't turn out the best pictures of its young life. Even though I have entered into the Holy State of Acrimony I spend hours a day in my darkroom having more darned fun. I dare say it's kinder anyway to leave my busy husband in peace and quiet to work. In fact, I'm getting quite well trained as to the best method of dealing with genius, which simply is to *leave it alone!* I keep myself as busy as a bee. One reason Jim says he liked me from the beginning was that I seemed able to look out for myself and wasn't always hanging about somebody's neck. I've taken over one room as my own office, and Ma's secretary comes in to help me out with correspondence in the mornings—I attend to *all* Jim's—and I'm organizing a charity of my own as well. Nothing will get me to give up photography and my darkroom, nor could I bear to give up breeding my

pups, and Jim says he has no objection to my taking in two grandchildren of Lord and Lady Sulgrave "for the duration," so long as I keep them from getting under foot. So you can see my hands are going to be full!

I do hope you'll both be on from California soon, as I can't wait to have you see Jim. I know just what you mean by saying you feel as though he were already an old friend, because I felt just that way myself before I met him, and simply wouldn't miss one of his broadcasts for the world. But really, Aunty Kay, you just can't believe how wonderful he is until you get to know him—face to face, I mean, and not just on the air. And the wonderful thing is, he's not the least bit conceited. Sometimes I think he gets a little irritated with me for bringing the conversation round to his work, showing a photograph or a clipping or something. I suppose you've seen in the papers that he is going to be the star commentator of the American Broadcasting System, to go on every night—for the largest salary EVER.

The family are simply crazy about him and have been marvelous about my marrying a divorcé, which is hardly in the Briggs tradition! But since I've explained everything, that it was all his wife's fault and that I hadn't even met him until she was already in Reno, they've been delighted. I guess they were so glad to have this chee-ild take the plunge that they were even willing not to have me married from the farm the way Nellsie, Franzie, and Pollsie were. And, of course, to have such a Lion in the family is something!!!

Yes indeed, the world seems topsy-turvy. Jim feels that the Neutrality Act must be amended if we're to help England—which is, of course, vital. He thinks Winston Churchill the greatest figure of the last fifty years.

Do come East soon, and see the Lucky Man for yourselves. In the meantime, Beloved Aunt and Unc, you may have grasped my general drift, which is simply that J. L. Hurd is about perfect in the eyes of

Mrs. J. L. Hurd  
(Alias your loving niece, Sallsie)

Radnor, Pa.  
July 30, 1941

Dearest Sloo,

That reproduction of Van Gogh's *Wheat Fields* will hang in our very best-est guest-est room, where you must come and, ensconced in your downy, feast your orbs on its beauties.

You ask how I like being married to anyone so famous, and my answer is I *love* it! The publicity sometimes is a little trying. I literally can't buy a yard of ribbon without having the salesgirl say when I give my name, "Say, is that the same J. L. Hurd I listen to on the radio?"

The poor baby needs somebody to kind of *deal* with life for him, so I see I'm not going to have a dull moment. At present things are unusually hectic, as his daughter Barby is spending a month with us. She's a queer little piece. I must say I feel sorry for her, as her Ma has just gone and married again, which is why she's with us, and I guess it came as kind of a shock, and she can't figure out if she's fish, flesh, or good red herring. When she looks too solemn for words, I just don't pay any attention, and kind of kid her along, and call her Miss Sour Pussy or Miss Stuffy Cat, and just take it in my stride. She'll snap out of it all right, I'm sure. I really am keen to do everything I can to make her feel at home. I got her room sort of dolled up for her, but she not only never mentioned it to me, but didn't mention anything else either.

She just sits and stares at me with huge brown eyes. The younger generation isn't a bit the way it was when I went to college. She doesn't seem to laugh at all, and she has the funniest habit of talking to Jim as though I weren't there at all.

Sloo, you were a peach to think of me and thanks again, loads.

Your old pal  
Briggsy

P.S. You must come and spend a week-end sometime soon, though with Jim as busy as he is at the moment, I'm attempting to protect him a little, as he gets very easily bored!

P.P.S. I just asked him if he wouldn't love to have you, because I remembered your talking to him at the garden party.

and he said, "Is she the fat one or the thin one?" So you see you *must* come to refresh his memory!!

Radnor, Pa.

September 5, 1941

Dear Raytch,

How did you ever think of those two darling cocktail glasses with HIS and HERs written on the side, not to mention the shaker marked OURS! They're the merriest present we've had. The cocktail hour is always the best part of the day, and hereafter we'll often drink to *you*, Raytch!

It's quite hard to look on the cheery side of life today as my Better Half is in New York, having left me by my lonesome here. But as I've been feeling distinctly rocky lately, come 11 A.M., it seems best to stick at home. (As one married matron to another, my dear, I am definitely hopeful! My sister Franzie rather grossly says Briggses are Breeders, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed. For the moment I'm calling him Jimminy Cricket, but when he puts in an appearance—he's just got to be a he if Jim is going to stay married to me—he's going to be James Leverett Hurd, Jr.)

You've probably heard through various and sundry friends how busy I've been getting my new charity, Bombed Britain, under way. It's more or less my own pet organization, with me as the U. S. chairman and Aunt Margaret (Lady Sulgrave) acting as our English patroness. I hear the Main Line BWRS girls are fit to be tied, but I'm sure what I do will be much more direct. My family and Jim kid me and say I'm such a dynamo that people prefer Bombed Britain to Bombardment by Briggsy, and appease me at once by doing whatever I ask! This, on top of my job as the wife of a Great Man, has kept me awfully busy. I really think I've got things pretty well organized for Jim. He spends most of his time in his den, lined with photographs of clipper ships given him by the family as a wedding present, and I answer *all* telephones, and write *all* letters for him, so he just doesn't have to *think* for himself—except, of course, about his broadcasts. We don't even meet for lunch. I have it sent in to him on a tray, which apparently is a

treat for him, as his first wife was forever nagging him to be on time, insisted on formal meals, dressing every night for dinner, butlers, flunkies behind every chair, etc., etc. So you see it's quite a contrast! Comfort, and no fuss or feathers, is my motto.

If we ever get anywhere near Chicago, you can bet your blinking boots I'll let you know.

Thanks a million and slews of love,

Briggsy

P.S. I've just talked to Jim in New York and described the shaker and glasses to him in detail. I know he'll be thrilled when he sees them!

*Radnor, Pa.*

*October 9, 1941*

My angel Sow,

You were wonderful to crash through with that knockout silver picture frame. I'm sure it can be no surprise to you to know that the picture of my One and Only is already gracing it. He really is the best-looking thing—not handsome actually—and he has to wear those wretched glasses—but he looks so big and so damned distinguished somehow that it still is a mystery how he could have picked on little (!) *me*.

It's at least some consolation having a good photograph as I hardly ever see Himself face to face. For the past month he has been broadcasting every single night and will be forever after, I imagine—and the strain is tee-rific. His only relaxation being burning autumn leaves and chopping wood. I wish you could see him in a pair of old gray flannel pants, with his shirt sleeves rolled up, swinging an ax with so much fury that you'd think he had Hitler himself under it—or someone he hates as much!

However, I did achieve one fling of social life here at the farm.

When Francine Bassett was here I threw a really knockout party in her honor. We had it in the Rowdy Room—tickets sold at \$5 per—and all for the benefit of my own special pet, Bombed Britain. The barn was fixed like a super-air-raid shelter and

we had a perambulating canteen with champagne in coffee cups, etc. The big feature of the evening was a surprise black-out, with mock air-raid sirens blowing, etc. It got a marvelous rise out of everybody and put them all in a distinctly jovial mood. Some of my photographs were auctioned off for the Cause, and, all in all, a fine time was had by all.

Thanks again, Sow, for the frame and much love from

Briggsy

P.S. I'm so glad Tom is enjoying his work. Washington must be a *fascinating* place to be in these days. *Everybody* seems to be there. Don't you feel thrilled just to be alive at all at this point in the world's history!

Radnor, Pa.

November 18, 1941

Dear Dork,

How perfectly angelic of you to think of sending me a wedding present all the way from Oregon. That reproduction of Van Gogh's *Wheat Fields* is a special favorite of mine and will hang over the telephone in the hall and help me to be forgiving when the operator gives me the wrong number!

I'm so glad you liked the article in *Liberty*. Its account of a day in the life of "America's Ace Commentator" was really pretty accurate. If only the pictures could have given any idea of the noise that goes on in Jim's studio—fifteen news tickers—A.P., U.P., I.N.S., etc.—all going at different speeds, about eight people all talking at once to each other over the phone, plus a radio loudspeaker that broadcasts all the news programs and half the time music as well.

Home life isn't much more peaceful, as Jim is forever dicker-  
ing with the short wave or tapping his typewriter, and no won-  
der I'm always trying to tempt him to get a snack to eat, as  
shown in the picture! I *do* sit at home and listen to him every  
night because it makes him nervous to have me with him in  
the studio!—with, I suppose, the same broad grin on my face  
as shown, slightly à la cat that swallowed the canary!

The pictures of me and all my activity for Bombed Britain,  
Inc., were marvelous publicity for the cause. I was quite

thrilled because our friend Francine Bassett, who is my New York chairman, organized a big party at the St. Regis last week, with stars of stage and screen giving their services for nothing, and she insisted on my being Guest of Honor. I nearly went through the floor when I stepped up to the microphone, and the British Consul General introduced me, and, my dear, the applause was simply deafening. He gave a long spiel about how I had got this thing going singlehanded, and then read a cable from Lady Sulgrave, *most* laudatory about me, and anyway it really was quite an occasion! Specially as Jim, if you please, sat on the side lines—he'd come in late, after his broadcast, which they let him do in New York—and refused so much as to open his mouth because he insisted it was *my* evening. We had the same mock air raid and Blitz Buffet we had at our party at home and afterwards about a dozen of us went from night club to night club—spending a small fortune!—and made a night of it. I don't think I've had such fun in years. Of course, everywhere Jim went he was recognized, so all in all we were on the crest of the wave. I mean it's just terrible to think of all the suffering and all that in Europe, but I can't bear people who go around with long faces. In fact, I think they're absolute defeatists and think we owe it to the national morale to keep *cheery!*

In New York I also met for the first time Jim's oldest friend, Paul Dunster. They knew each other at Amherst, and then they were on the New York *World* together. He's still an inconspicuous and, I'm afraid, pretty radical newspaperman. He looks like a poor little white ghost, but that's because he was wounded fighting in Spain; his lungs have been affected, so he hasn't found a job since he got back and, poor man, just has to sit around while his wife—whom Jim says he simply adores—supports him by writing publicity for some advertising agency.

Paul had seen in the paper that Jim was in town—there'd been a description of the party at the St. Regis and mentioned we were staying there—and called him up. So we went miles downtown and had supper with them in their tiny apartment. It was quite a thrill for me, as I'd never even *seen* the Village, my dear! Nan, his wife, is Jewish, but you'd *never* know it and

she really is terribly nice. She cooked the entire dinner herself—imagine, on top of a whole day at the office!—which was simply scrumptious. As I told her, I don't know when I have been so *impressed*!

I tell you this, Dork, so that you won't be silly and think that we're both such lions now that I wouldn't have time for old friends. Ye Gods, who do you think we *are*? Whenever you come East, be *sure* and let me know, or I'll never speak to you again—*ever*!

Thanks again just oodles, Dork, for the picture.

As ever with love,  
Briggsy

236 *Beacon Street, Boston*

*December 7, 1941*

Darling Egg,

Have you ever noticed that if you have a letter on your mind you've been wanting to write for ages, the only time you ever get round to it is when you're visiting somebody else! Because you live so far away I haven't wanted to put you off with just a little scratchy note. Honestly those book ends were knockout. You know I love anything in the shape of a scottie, and they are happily ensconced in our living room at Radnor, adding to my growing menagerie! Thanks just loads for thinking of me.

At the moment I am spending the week-end in Boston, with Jim's Cousin Roger and Susie Leverett, as Jim spoke on Friday evening at a huge Men-of-Good-Will Rally in Symphony Hall. The papers yesterday morning were plastered with pictures of him, interviews, etc., etc. He was simply on the dead run—taken to lunch by some Harvard professor at the Saturday Club, a dinner given in his honor at the Tavern Club, etc., etc. He is quite the Conquering Hero!

I wish you could have been in Symphony Hall. I didn't know there were so many fur coats and jewels in Boston. The entire carriage trade of the city turned out in his honor. And when Jim came on the stage, looking so distinguished and modest, with his shoulders slightly stooping and his hands stuck in his pockets, not only did the audience burst into thunderous ap-

plause and cheers, but they all stood up, which, for good old Bean Town, is some pumpkins!

So you can see it was all pretty exciting, and I have barely caught my breath since. In fact, the lovely Sunday breakfast—baked beans, brown bread, and fish balls (I'm eating for two these days, said she modestly)—in front of an open fire, on a comfy chaise longue, has given me my first real moment in which to digest it all since I arrived.

Jim has been pacing around the room like a caged animal—you know what a bull in a china shop a man *is* when his wife is having breakfast in bed!—and has gone so often to flatten his nose against the windowpane that I could see he was dying to get out. Finally he said, “I believe I'll get out there and take a walk.”

“All right, Jimbo-Jumbo. Just wait half a sec and I'll get into my togs and be right with you.” The Briggs girls haven't changed since you knew them, my dear—same old Scotch plaids in town and country, same old Peel brogues and Highland cap with ribbons down my back. At the moment all my clothes have been let out “for the duration,” so I look like a Scottish chieftain under full sail, and Jim says all I need is the bagpipes!

Sometimes I can't understand Jim. Maybe he's just considerate. He said, “I don't think I would if I were you, Sal. I walk pretty fast, you know—and it mightn't be good for you.” By which he meant he was worried about Jimminy Cricket, who, I may say, is dancing quite a jig at the moment.

So now here I am looking out at the beautiful Charles River, all sparkling and blue in the sunlight, and my heart just about exploding. I'm so happy. My darling Jim. Sometimes I worry because he seems so on edge a lot of the time. I think he feels just sick about the world. When anyone knows as much as he does, who can blame him?

I love to think of him right now, with his hands in his pockets, and his shoulders stooping, walking along on this bright, sunny morning, without a cloud in the sky, sniffing his native east wind. When he looks back to his youth, and when he thinks of all the foul times he's come through and looks at

what he's made of his life, and where he is today, all his thoughts should be happy ones.

I *must* stop and get busy about making out a Christmas list which I haven't even thought of yet. Isn't this always the most *hectic* time of the entire year?

A fond farewell, Egg me gal, and slews of love.

Briggsy

# Advice to the Little Peyton Girl

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by DOROTHY PARKER

MISS MARION'S eyes were sweet and steady beneath her folded honey-colored hair, and her mouth curved gently. She looked as white and smooth as the pond-lilies she had set floating in the blue glass bowl on the low table. Her drawing-room was all pale, clear colors and dark, satiny surfaces, and low light slanted through parchment—Miss Marion's room, from the whole world, hushed for her step, dim to enhance her luminous pallor and her soft and gracious garments. It was sanctuary to the little Peyton girl; and Miss Marion's voice was soothing as running water, and Miss Marion's words were like cool hands laid on her brow.

Before she had decided to do it, the little Peyton girl had told all her trouble. It was, as you looked at it, either a girl's fool worry or the worst of human anguish. For two weeks the little Peyton girl had not seen the Barclay boy. He had become preoccupied with other little girls.

"What shall I do, Miss Marion?" the little Peyton girl said.

Miss Marion's eyes, dark with compassion, dwelt on the small, worried face.

"You like him so much, Sylvie?" she said.

"I—yes, you see, I—" the girl said, and stopped to swallow. "It's so awful without him; it's so awful. You see, we saw each other every day—every single day, all summer. And he'd always telephone me, when he got home, even if he'd left me ten minutes before. And he'd always call me as soon as he woke up, to say good morning and tell me he was coming over. Every day. Oh, Miss Marion, you don't know how lovely it was."

"Yes, I do, dear," Miss Marion said. "I know, Sylvie."

"And then it just stopped," the girl said. "It just suddenly stopped."

"Really suddenly, Sylvie?" Miss Marion said.

"Well," Sylvie said. She tried a little smile. "Why, one night, you see, he'd been over at our house—we'd been sitting on the porch. And then he went home, and he didn't telephone me. And I waited and waited. I—I can't tell you how awful it was. You wouldn't think it would matter that much, that he didn't call up, would you? But it did."

"I know it did," Miss Marion said. "It does."

"I couldn't sleep, I couldn't do anything," Sylvie said. "It—oh, it got to be half-past two. I couldn't imagine what had happened. I thought he'd smashed up in his car or something."

"I wonder if you really thought that, dear," Miss Marion said.

"Why, of course, I—" the girl said, and then she shook her head. "You know everything, Miss Marion, don't you? No, I—well, you see, there was a dance at the club and we'd sort of thought of going, only I—well, I didn't want to go to dances very much; it was much nicer just being alone with him. So I guess what I thought was he'd gone on to the dance when he left our house. And I just got so I couldn't stand it, and I called him up."

"Yes," Miss Marion said. "You called him up. How old are you, Sylvie? Nineteen, aren't you? And I've seen women of thirty-nine make just the same mistakes. It's strange. And was he home when you called him?"

"Yes," Sylvie said. "I—well, I woke him up, you see, and he wasn't very nice about it. And I asked him why he hadn't called me, and he—he said there wasn't any reason to call me, he'd been with me all evening, he didn't have anything to say. And he hadn't been to the dance, only—you see, I thought he had. I—I didn't believe him. And so I cried."

"He heard you cry?" Miss Marion said.

"Yes," Sylvie said, "He said—excuse me, Miss Marion—he said, 'Oh, for the love of God' and he hung up. And I just

couldn't bear that, not saying good night or anything, and so I—so I called him up again."

"Oh, my poor child," Miss Marion said.

"He said he was sorry he'd hung up," Sylvie said, "and everything was all right, only I asked him again wouldn't he please tell me honestly whether he'd been to the dance. And he—oh, he just talked *awfully*, Miss Marion. I can't tell you."

"Don't, dear," Miss Marion said.

"So after that," the girl said, "oh, I don't know—it went on, every day, for a while, and then lots of times he didn't telephone, and then there were days he didn't come over—he'd be playing tennis and things with other people. And then Kitty Grainger came back from Dark Harbor, and I—I guess he went over to her house a lot. They all do."

"Did you tell him you didn't like that?" Miss Marion said.

"Yes, I did, Miss Marion," Sylvie said. "I couldn't help it—it made me so mad. She's an awful girl; she's just awful. Why, she'd kiss *anybody*. She's the kind that always leaves dances and goes out on the golf course with some boy and doesn't come back for *hours*. It made me simply wild that he'd rather be with her than with me. Honestly, it wouldn't have been bad if it had been some terribly nice girl, some one miles more attractive than me. That wouldn't have been so bad, would it, Miss Marion?"

"I don't know, dear," Miss Marion said. "I'm afraid one never thinks a man leaves one for a finer woman. But, Sylvie—one *never* points out the imperfections of his friends."

"Well, I couldn't help it," Sylvie said. "And so we had some terrible rows, you see. Kitty Grainger and those friends of hers—why, they're just the same kind she is! So, well, then I sort of saw him less and less, and, you see, every time he came over I was so scared it was the last time that I wasn't much fun, I guess. And I kept asking him what was the matter that he didn't come over every day the way he used to, and he said there wasn't a thing the matter. And I'd keep saying was it anything I'd done, and he said no, of course it wasn't. Honestly he did, Miss Marion. And now—well, I haven't seen him for two weeks. Two weeks. And I haven't heard a word from him. And

—and I just don't think I can stand it, please, Miss Marion. Why, he *said* there was nothing the matter. I didn't know that you could see somebody every day, all the time, and then it would just stop. I didn't think it could stop."

"Weren't you ever afraid it would, Sylvie?" Miss Marion said.

"Oh, the last times I saw him, I was," the girl said. "And—well, I suppose I was, right from the start. It was so much fun, I thought it was too wonderful to last. He's so attractive and everything, I was always scared about other girls. I used to tell him, oh, I knew he'd throw me down. It was just fooling, of course; but it wasn't, too."

"You see, Sylvie," Miss Marion said, "men dislike dismal prophecies. I know Bunny Barclay is only twenty, but all men are the same age. And they all hate the same things."

"I wish I were like you, Miss Marion," Sylvie said. "I wish I always knew what to do. I guess I've done everything wrong. But still, he *said* there was nothing the matter. You don't know how awful it is not to be able to talk to him now. If we could just talk things over, if we could just get things straightened out, I think—"

"No, dear," Miss Marion said. "Men hate straightening out unpleasantness. They detest talking things over. Let the past die, my child, and go gaily on from its unmarked grave. Remember that when you see Bunny again, Sylvie. Behave as if you had been laughing together an hour before."

"But maybe I'll never see him again," the girl said. "I can't get near him. I've called him and I've called him and I've called him. Why, I telephoned him three times today! And he's never home. Well, he can't always be out, Miss Marion. Usually it's his mother that answers. And she'd say he was out, anyway. She hates me."

"Don't, child," Miss Marion said. "When one is unhappy, it is easy to think that the world is hostile; especially the part of the world that immediately surrounds the cause of one's unhappiness. Of course, Mrs. Barclay doesn't hate you, Sylvie. How could she?"

"Well, she always says he's out," Sylvie said; "and she never knows what time he'll be back. Maybe it's true. Oh, Miss

Marion, do you think I'll ever see him again? Do you, truly?"

"Yes, I do," Miss Marion said, "and I believe you think so, too, dear. Of course, you will. Don't you go to the club to play tennis?"

"I haven't been for ages," the girl said. "I haven't gone anywhere. It makes Mother just frantic, but I don't want to go anywhere. I—I don't want to see him with Kitty and Elsie Taylor and all that crowd. I know he's with one or the other of them all the time—people tell me. And they say, 'What's the matter with you and Bunny, anyway? Did you have a fight?' And when I say there's nothing the matter, they look at me so queerly. But he *said* there wasn't anything the matter. Ah, why did he say that, Miss Marion? Didn't he mean it?"

"I'm afraid he didn't," Miss Marion said.

"Then what is it?" Sylvie said. "Oh, please tell me what to do. Tell me what you do, that everyone loves you so. You must know everything, Miss Marion. I'll do anything on earth you say. It—oh, made my heart go all quick, when you said you thought I was going to see him again. Do you think—do you think maybe we could ever be the way we were?"

"Dear Sylvie," Miss Marion said, "listen. Yes, I think that you and Bunny may be close again, but it is you that must accomplish it. And it isn't going to be easy, child. It isn't going to be quick. There is no charm you can repeat to bring back love in a moment. You must have two things—patience and courage; and the first is much harder to summon than the second. You must wait, Sylvie, and it's a bad task. You must not telephone him again, no matter what happens. Men cannot admire a girl who—well, it's a hard word, but I must say it—pursues them. And you must go back to your friends, and go about with them. You are not to stay at home and pray for the telephone to ring—no, dear. Go out and make yourself gay, and gaiety will come to you. Don't be afraid that your friends will ask you questions or look at you queerly; you will give them no reason to. And people don't really say cruel things, dear; it is only in anticipation that pride is hurt."

"And when you meet Bunny again, it must all be different. For there was something the trouble, no matter what he says;

something deeply the trouble. You showed him how much you cared for him, Sylvie, showed him he was all-important to you. Men do not like that. You would think they would find it sweet, but they do not. You must be light and you must be easy, for ease is the desire of all men. Talk to him gaily and graciously when you see him, and never hint of the sorrow he has caused you. Men hate reminders of sadness. And there must never be any reproaches, and there must never, never, never be any more 'terrible rows.' Nothing so embarrasses a man as to see a woman lose her dignity.

"And you must conquer your fears, dear child. A woman in fear for her love can never do right. Realize that there are times he will want to be away from you; never ask him why or where. No man will bear that. Don't predict unhappiness, nor foresee a parting; he will not slip away if you do not let him see that you are holding him. Love is like quicksilver in the hand, Sylvie. Leave the fingers open and it stays in the palm; clutch it, and it darts away. Be, above all things, always calm. Let it be peace to be with you.

"Never in this world make him feel guilty, no matter what he has done. If he does not call you when he has said he would, if he is late for an appointment with you, do not refer to it. Make him feel that all is well, always. Be sweet and gay and always, always calm.

"And trust him, Sylvie. He is not deliberately hurting you. He never will unless you suggest it. Trust yourself, too. Don't let yourself become insecure. It sounds an impudence to remind you that there are always others, when I know that it is only he you want; but it is a heartening thought. And he is not to know that he is the sun, that there is no life without him. He must never know that again.

"It is a long way, Sylvie, and a hard one, and you must watch every step you take along it. But it is the only way with a man."

"I see, Miss Marion," the girl said. She had not once taken her eyes from Miss Marion's. "I see what you must do. It—no, it isn't easy, is it? But if it will work—"

"It always has, dear," Miss Marion said.

The girl's face looked as if she beheld a rising sun. "I'm going

to try, Miss Marion," she said. "I'm going to try never to do wrong things. I'm going to try—why, I'm going to try to be like you, and then he'd have to like me. It would be so wonderful to be like you; to be wise and lovely and gentle. Men must all adore you. You're—oh, you're just perfect. How do you know what is always the right thing to do?"

Miss Marion smiled. "Well, you see," she said, "I have had several more years than you in which to practice."

When the little Peyton girl had gone, Miss Marion moved slowly about the gracious room, touching a flower, moving a magazine. But her eyes did not follow her pale fingers, and her thoughts seemed absent from her small, unnecessary tasks. Once she looked at the watch on her wrist, and uttered an exclamation; and then she consulted it so frequently that the tiny minute-hand had little opportunity to move, between her glances. She lighted a cigarette, held it from her to consider the spiraling streamer of smoke, then crushed it cold. She rested in a low chair, rose from it and went to the sofa, then went back to the chair. She opened a large and glistening magazine, but turned no pages. Between the bands of honey-colored hair, her white brow was troubled.

Suddenly she rose again, put down the magazine, and with quick, firm steps that were not her habit swept across the room to the tall desk where the telephone rested. She dialed a number, with little sharp rips of sound.

"May I speak to Mr. Lawrence, please?" she said, after some seconds. "Oh, he isn't? Oh. Is this his secretary speaking? Could you tell me when he will be in, please? Oh, I see. Well, if he does come in, will you ask him please to call Miss Marion? No, Marion. No, that's all—that's the last name. Yes, he knows the number. Thank you so much."

Miss Marion replaced the receiver and sat looking at the telephone as if it offended her sight. She spoke aloud, and neither the tone nor the words seemed hers.

"Damn that woman," she said. "She knows damned well what my name is. Just because she hates me—"

For the next minutes, Miss Marion walked the room so rapidly that it was almost as if she ran. Her graceful gown was

adapted to no such pace, and it dragged and twisted about her ankles. Her face was flushed with alien color when she went to the telephone again, and her hand shook as she turned the dial.

"May I speak to Mr. Lawrence, please?" she said. "Oh, hasn't he? Well, couldn't you please tell me where I could reach him? Oh, you don't know. I see. Have you any idea if he will be in later? I see. Thank you. Well, if he does come in, would you be good enough to ask him to telephone Miss Marion? Yes, Marion—Cynthia Marion. Thank you. Yes, I telephoned before. Please be sure to tell him to call me, will you? Thank you very much."

Slowly Miss Marion hung the receiver back in its place. Slowly her shoulders sagged, and her long, delicate body seemed to lose its bones. Then her arms were on the desk and her face buried in them, and the cool folds of her hair loosened and flew wild as she rolled her head from side to side. The room seemed to slip into shadow, as if to retreat from the sound of her sobs. Words jumbled among the moans in her throat.

"Oh, he said he'd call, he said he'd call. He said there was nothing the trouble, he said of course he'd call. Oh, he said so."

The knotted, choking noises died away presently, and she had been silent and still for some while before she raised her head and reached for the telephone. She was forced to stop twice during her turning of the dial, so that she might shake the tears from her eyes and see. When she spoke, her voice shook and soared.

"May I speak to Mr. Lawrence, please?" she said.

# *The Cure*

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*by COLETTE*

**T**HE gray cat is delighted that I have gone back to the stage. I disappear every evening, once her chop is gulped down, to reappear soon after midnight, and we then sit down to the table afresh, the leg of chicken or the pink ham before us. We have become domestic again, unsociable, strangers to almost everything, indifferent to almost everyone. But now we are going to see our friend Valentine again, our "socially well-connected" friend Valentine, and we are going to hear her discourse on a world strange and little known to us, full of snares and duties and restrictions, a formidable world if one were to trust it, yet a world so far from me that I can scarcely conceive it.

During my apprenticeship in ballet and comedy, my cautious, bewildered, squeamish friend Valentine dropped out of my life. It is her usual polite way of condemning my sort of existence. I am never offended. I tell myself that she has a husband in automobiles, a society painter for a lover, a salon, weekly teas, and fortnightly dinners. Can you see me doing "La Chair" or "La Faune" at one of Valentine's soirées, or dancing the "Serpent Bleu" before her guests? I am reconciled to it. I can wait. I know that my "socially well-connected" friend will return, one of these days, contrite, embarrassed. Little or much, she needs me. I have had proof of it; that is enough to make me indebted to her.

She is at the door. I have recognized her brief and precise ring at the bell, that ring of "genteel" company.

"Well, Valentine! It's been a long time . . ."

Something in her look, in the whole expression of her face, prevents me from going on. I cannot say how my friend has

changed. Is she ill? No, she never appears ill under the velvety powder and rose-wash on her cheeks. Hers is always the air of the elegant mannequin, her figure slender, her hips compressed under a golden skirt of tussore silk. She has blue-gray-green-chestnut eyes, blossoming like flowers between the double fringe of her blackened lashes, and a mass, a beautiful mass, of Viking-blond hair. . . . What can be wrong? A tarnishing of all that, a new fixity in her glance, a moral discoloration, if I might put it that way, which disconcerts and arrests the banalities of welcome on my lips. In the meantime, she sits down, adroitly twisting into position in her long gown, flattening the frill of her lingerie with a touch, smiles and speaks, speaks until I interrupt her brusquely, "Valentine, what is wrong with you?"

She is not at all surprised and answers simply, "Nothing. Almost nothing, really. He has left me."

"What? Henri . . . your . . . Henri has left you?"

"Yes," says she. "It is exactly three weeks ago, today."

Her voice is so sweet, so calm, that I am reassured. "Ah! You . . . you have had grief?"

"No," she says with the same sweetness. "I have not had it. I have it."

Her eyes become, all at once, large, wide; they question mine with sudden sharpness. "Yes, I am wild with grief. Oh! what grief! Tell me, is it going to keep up like this? Am I going to suffer forever? Don't you know a way . . . ? I can't get used to it. What on earth shall I do?"

Poor child! She is astonished at suffering, she has not believed herself capable of it. "Your husband, Valentine—he knows nothing?"

"No," she said impatiently, "he knows nothing. That isn't involved. But what am I to do? Surely you must have some idea? For a fortnight now I have been like this, asking myself what I am to do."

"You still love him?"

She hesitates. "I don't know. I want him terribly, because he no longer loves me and because he has left me. I don't know.

I only know that it is unbearable, unbearable, this solitude, this loss of everything one has loved, this void, this—”

She gets up at the word “unbearable” and paces the room as though stung by a burn.

“You don’t seem to understand. You don’t know what I’m talking about, you—”

I lower my eyes. I check a compassionate smile. This is a childish vanity in suffering, in suffering better and more than anyone else.

“Child, you are wearing yourself out. Don’t walk up and down like that. Sit down. Why don’t you take your hat off and have a quiet cry?”

The violence of her denial sets the smoke-colored plumes dancing on her head.

“No, thank you! Crying would bore me! It would ruin my complexion, and what, I ask you, would it accomplish? I don’t envy tears, my dear. My blood is boiling, that’s all there’s to it.”

She sits down again, throws her parasol on the table. Her small hard face is not without real beauty at this moment. It occurs to me that for three weeks, now, she has been decking herself out as usual, meticulously constructing the fragile edifice of her hair. For three weeks—twenty-one days!—she has resisted denunciatory tears, blackened her blond lashes with a sure hand, she has gone out, received, gossiped, eaten. A doll’s heroism, but heroism all the same!

I should seize her, perhaps, in a great fraternal embrace, draw her to me, melt in my warm clasp this hard little creature, kicking and enraged at her own sorrow. She would break down and sob, it would ease the tension of those nerves to which she probably has not yielded in three weeks. I don’t dare. We are not as intimate as that, Valentine and I, and her brief confidences are not enough to make up for two months of separation.

Besides, what need is there for mollification, for coddling like a wet nurse this fierce force which really sustains my friend? “Tears heal all—” Yes, yes, I know that cliché! I also know the danger of tears, the intoxication of lonely tears without end. One cries because one has just cried and one begins again; one continues, carried away, to the point of choking, to the

point of nervous exhaustion, until one falls into a drunken sleep from which one wakens, puffy, mottled, bewildered, ashamed of oneself and sadder than before. No tears, no tears! I have the impulse to praise, to congratulate my friend who is still sitting before me, wide-eyed and tearless.

“You are right, my dear,” I finally say.

I am careful to put it casually, as if I were complimenting her on the choice of a hat.

“You are right in taking it as you do—if there isn’t any remedy, any reconciliation possible—”

“There isn’t,” she says, as coldly as I.

“No? Then you must wait.”

“Wait? What for?”

What sudden awakening, what wild hope! I shake my head:

“Wait for the cure, for the end of love. You are suffering much, but what is coming is worse. There will be a time—a month from now, three months from now, I know not when—when you will begin to suffer in spells. You will have respites, those moments of animal oblivion which occur, without one’s knowing why, because the weather is fine, because one has slept well, or because one is a little ill. Oh! my child! How awful, then, the return to the old hurt. It swoops down on you without warning, sparing nothing. At some innocent, soft moment, some calm, painless moment, in the midst of a gesture, of a burst of laughter, the *idea*, the sudden and terrible memory of your dreadful loss dries the laughter in your throat, arrests the hand raising the teacup to your lips, leaving you terrified, hoping for death with the innocent belief that you cannot suffer so much without dying. But you will not die—you, no more than the rest. Respite will come to you, from time to time, unpredictably, capriciously. It will be—it will really be awful. But—”

“But?” My friend is listening, less defiant, now, less hostile.

“But it will get even worse!”

I have not been guarding my voice carefully enough. At a movement from my friend I lower my tone.

“Even worse. The time will come when you will hardly suffer at all. Yes! You will be virtually cured, and that is when you

become 'a lost soul,' someone who wanders, seeking she knows not what, she will not tell herself what.

"At that time, the return of the old pain seems benign, and by a curious compensation, the respite, the giddy, hopeless emptiness that transforms the heart, becomes abominable. The heart seems drained, riddled, loose in a breast shaken by tremulous sobs that do not even spring from sorrow. You leave home without destination, you walk without purpose, you pause without being tired. You claw at the place of your recent suffering with stupid avidity, without succeeding in drawing a drop of fresh blood—you set yourself, frantically, at a wound already half dry, you miss—I swear it to you!—you miss the sharp, clean burn. That is the sterile, aimless period when the mind is embittered with doubts and qualms. Oh, there are qualms! Qualms at being beyond the compulsion of a beautiful, passionate despair. You will think yourself low, blighted, inferior to the most commonplace of creatures. You will say to yourself, 'No, this is not, this cannot be me!—not even the equal of any love-lorn shopgirl who throws herself into the Seine?' Oh, Valentine! You will blush at yourself in secret, and then—"

"And then . . . ?"

God, what hope! I have never seen her eyes more beautifully amber, her pupils larger, her mouth as anguished.

"And then, the cure, my friend, the real cure. That comes—mysteriously. One doesn't feel it right away. It is like the gradual recovery from so many ills. Believe me! It will come, I know not when. One sweet, spring morning, or wet day in fall, or perhaps some night when there is a full moon, you will feel something intangible and vibrant, expanding voluptuously in your heart—happiness uncoiling and growing longer like a snake—a velvet caterpillar, unfolding—something breaking loose, tearing itself open, like an iris when it bursts into blossom. Without knowing why, you will knot your hands behind your head with a strange smile. You will discover with returning wonder that the daylight is pink through your lace curtains, that the carpet is soft under your bare feet—that the scent of flowers and of ripe fruit is no longer stifling, but exhilarating. You will taste an apprehensive kind of happiness, free of all

greed, delicate and a little shy, yet proud of itself, concerned with itself."

My friend seizes my hands. "More! More! Tell me more!"

Alas! What more is she hoping for? Haven't I already promised her enough, in promising her cure? I smile and stroke her small warm hands. "More? That's all there is to it, child. What more do you want?"

"What more do I want? Love, of course, love."

My hands drop hers. "Ah! yes—another love. You want *another* love."

It is true. I had not thought of another love. I examine closely that anxious, pretty face, her graceful body, so studied, trim. Already she is longing for another love, a better love, or a worse one, or a love like the one which has just died in her. Without irony, but without pity, either, I assure her, "Yes, child, yes. You will find another love. I promise you that."

# Women and Children

THE Season of Summer" is a sentient study by the author of *The Prodigal Women* of the effect on women of pregnancy. Herself the mother of two children, Nancy Hale shares with many women an almost mystical feeling about the "preoccupations of pregnancy."

There are, however, women who resent child-bearing, still more the child as an intruder into the mother's career or marriage. Gladys Schmitt, author of the widely acclaimed *Gates of Aulis*, portrays the effect on a child of such rejection, and accentuates in "Consider the Giraffe" the terrible power and responsibility of women's relation to children.

"Child and the Bird" suggests, on the other hand, the strong tie of maternal love that most often binds mother to child. Margaret Shedd has watched war's blackouts over San Francisco with her children, and her story reflects the helpless longing felt by mothers in wartime to protect their young.



# *The Season of Summer*

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*by* NANCY HALE

ALL summer long I saw the three women walking beside the sea. They were pregnant, and it seemed to me that they stayed constantly with each other for the same reason that people possessed of the same secret, or special knowledge, seek each other out: scientists, or Freemasons, or nuns. They had a communication among themselves. One of them used to be a friend of mine; she was the wife of a sculptor, and I used to sit with her on Saturday afternoons in the stifling chamber of the Finnish steam bath behind the beach, in other summers, talking about clothes or husbands. But now we had nothing to talk about. When I saw her, her eyes passed me and went away to some other focus, and at the same time seemed to me to turn in upon something within her own mind. I have had children, too, but the preoccupations of pregnancy are a dream that is forgotten as entirely as the dream of birth pains. And so I did not often see to speak to these three women, but I saw them often, walking together or sitting together on a lawn in the sunshine.

Often as I came down the stony road from my house I would see them walking together beside the sea, picking their way slowly along the rocky little beach toward the path that leads up through the sassafras trees and the sweet fern to the long, high promontory of the Point. They walked in the mornings, often, and the sea was purple and the sky was blue and the rocks upon which they walked were orange and bright pink in the sun. They were strange and archaic figures, walking with clumsy grandeur; the wind blew the sharp beach grass against their blowing skirts and they walked slowly, with extreme care.

The wind tossed the small waves up upon the stones, and the gulls one by one dropped from the air and rode for an instant upon the sea, and the three women followed each other across the beach, their skirts blowing.

In July I heard that a friend of mine, who was also a friend of the sculptor's wife, was going to be married, and I felt that I must tell her this news. I looked for her and she was in the garden of one of the other women, the wife of a lobsterman. They were all three there. The lobsterman's wife was digging in the garden with a trowel; when I came she straightened up and looked at me. Her face was grave and composed. She had dark long hair parted in the middle and braided; the braids were wound round her head. The other two women sat in chairs in the grass and watched her dig. Their eyes would watch her for a while, and then lift to the sea that lay beyond the road. They did not talk to each other after I came, but it seemed to me that they had been talking together when I arrived, although I cannot tell of what.

I said that Valerie Gray was engaged to be married, that she would be married in December. They all turned on me their grave eyes and I remembered how much the names of months mean to women in like case. My friend the sculptor's wife nodded at me, and I was given the feeling that she had known this all along, that Valerie Gray was to be married in December, but when I asked her if she had heard of it before she shook her head.

"But isn't it wonderful!" I cried. "She writes that she's madly in love and everything's perfect."

The sculptor's wife smiled. The other two women smiled also, but retiringly, showing that they felt it was none of their business. All of their smiles were very much alike. They were mocking smiles. I don't know why I felt that they were scornful, but not contemptuous or belittling of the major event of love; only scornful with the eternal and curled lip of Greek marble statues.

I went away soon afterward and left them. The lobsterman's wife was digging again in her garden and the others were watching her. I don't know if they began to talk again when I was gone.

In August it is always beautiful there beside that northern sea and nowhere more beautiful than in the garden that the sculptor and his wife have made from part of their land. They have made a round pond from a brook that runs through it, and in the middle of the pond is one of the sculptor's statues, of a young girl, standing on an island made of rocks. The pond is deep in the shadows of a grove of birches as white and young as the stone girl, and it is cool there and dim and a little damp all through the hot month of August. They have put benches made of slabs of quarried granite supported by granite blocks, about through the birches, beside the smooth black pond and the brook that always runs with a tumbling sound away toward the sea. It is lovelier there than anywhere else. I went to see my friend in August one day, and she was there in the garden with her two companions, and three children. Two of the children were boys and belonged to the lobsterman's wife, and the third, a little girl, was the daughter of the Finnish stonemason's wife.

It was pleasant to do nothing and to sit in the green shadows and watch the children run among the birches. They were building something of stones under the trees, and they would run up along the stream to fetch more rocks, and come back carrying the rocks in both hands, leaning backward to balance the weight. They wore almost nothing, little drawers held up by crossed straps, white and faded pink and green, the whitish colors of washed-out cotton. Their voices were as high as the sound of the brook, and trickled in and out of its running as they called to each other.

I said to the lobsterman's wife that her children looked very much like her—the same black hair and dark eyes.

She said that it was Portuguese blood that made them so dark, and that her husband was Portuguese, too, on his mother's side.

“But his father always lived in these parts. Like the name shows. So this one might be yellow-haired, you can't tell.”

“You can't tell what you're going to get,” the stonemason's wife said.

“I've always thought these hospitals wouldn't be so good,”

the other said. "You might get your baby mixed up with somebody else's. Seems like you're more comfortable at home where you know where everything is."

"She's going to a hospital," the stonemason's wife said, nodding at my friend.

"I don't know why I do. Except it would make such a turmoil at home. My husband wouldn't know what to do. He's upset already; he keeps dropping things."

They all laughed, their antique and scornful laugh.

"*That's not a turmoil*," the lobsterman's wife said.

"I know."

I had the feeling while I was with them that I was being let in a little bit, hearing the sort of things they talked about among themselves. But when it was time for me to go I walked out of the shadows into the hot late-afternoon sun and turned around to look back once more, and they had all changed their positions in that short time. They had come closer together, shifted their seats, as if to resume something deeply private. It was as if I had turned around very quickly in a museum and the marble goddesses who had been so inscrutable when I was looking at them had not had time to stiffen back from a secret and Olympian conversation.

August grows hotter and hotter until near its end; then the evenings break from the long heat and a west wind comes shortly after sunset, bringing the smell of the bayberries and the sweet fern off the land. Soon after, the mornings are cool for the early part, and bit by bit the noons diminish from red to orange to yellow and the month turns to September. One day I drove to the village to get the paper and war had been declared. I sat in the car in front of the post office for a while and read the newspaper and thought about it. I sat there and looked at what I could see of the village, the postmistress's house next door, and the undertaker's shop next, and the village beer place where the loafers stood around. I wondered which of them might soon go to war and where they would be buried, so far away from this place. Beyond the beer place there is a road leading down to the harbor, and I could just see a

little blue water and a fishing boat edging out of the cut in the breakwater.

I drove home after a while, slowly, and I passed a small house, the Finnish stonemason's, just outside of the village. They were all there, the three women, sitting in chairs set out in the grass in the gentle September sunshine. My friend the sculptor's wife waved to me and I stopped the car. Where they were sitting was just on the other side of the picket fence. There was one tree on the lawn, a big locust, with leaves as delicate as lace through which the sunshine came and fell in fretwork on the grass. They all sat there in their quietness, with their hands lying in their laps and their faces smooth and wise in the sunlight.

"Where've you been?" my friend asked me.

"I went to get the paper."

"Any news?"

I did not like to tell the news to such women as these, in their inner dream that was all mystery and satisfaction. All three of them looked at me with their grave eyes.

"War's been declared," I said.

I saw the sculptor's wife look at the lobsterman's wife, and the lobsterman's wife nodded. It seemed as if she had known all about this long before. They none of them moved or spoke. I sat there for a moment longer before I started up the car to go on. The stonemason's wife got up slowly and walked into the shadow of the locust tree. She put her hand on the bark and slid it down the trunk. I saw the sculptor's wife looking off to sea, along the smooth waste that was now in this season hard bright blue. Her face was calm and entirely absorbed. The lobsterman's wife raised herself and very clumsily hitched her chair nearer to my friend's, and sat back in it again. They were living in a private dream, on the other side of the fence; I could not guess what they were thinking of, nor what fears they had, nor what they talked about together when they were alone. But it was all secret and all within themselves. I drove away back to my house and left them sitting on the grass beneath the locust tree.

# Consider the Giraffe

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by GLADYS SCHMITT

TIT WAS precisely the right day for going to the zoo. "Precisely," like "asinine" and "intolerable," was one of her mother's words. Her father's were thicker and harder to find in the dictionary—"antediluvian," "agrarian," "bourgeoisie." Only these words and the conversations draped around them were permanent things. Everything else—furnished apartments, jobs, cities, rage, and tenderness—shifted from one month to the next. During last year she had been in the fourth grade in three different places, and knew that it was no use growing fond of the view from any window, the voice of any schoolmate, or the leaf shadows around any bed. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow it would be necessary to be up and going again. The beloved four-poster would be lost; the ivy plant would stay behind on the abandoned windowsill. Only the conversations, thrown with differing degrees of success at different groups of people, were the same.

Anyhow, it was precisely the right day for going to the zoo.

There was enough sun to make you really want the cream of soda, and enough wind to dry the sweat on your forehead. The path was covered with jingling bits of light. The air parted the boughs and streamed down, and if you closed your eyes imaginary fingers stroked your hair. Here and there a maple tree, eager for autumn and yellow before the rest, broke upon you like an earthly sun. The caterpillar lay sleeping, curled in his cocoon on the bark, and you walked softly, not wanting to disturb his winter sleep. The park was beautiful enough; the park was a full week's share of loveliness. And the park was only a starter, like apple juice before a company dinner. After the park came the zoo.

Keeping far behind her father and mother, keeping out of the bluish shadow that trailed behind them on the walk, she thought how this holiday was a kind of miracle. Last night the zoo or anything pleasant had been out of the question. *They* had had one of their fights, screaming at each other in the midnight quiet of the apartment, so loudly that some neighbor had opened a window and shouted, "For God's sake!" They had still been fighting, hoarse now and in hissing whispers, when she fell asleep in the living room on the couch. But she had wakened in the muffling blackness that comes to unfamiliar rooms before daylight, and they had not been fighting *then*. A change, perceptible as a change in weather, had taken place. It was disturbing to waken to it, like wakening under February blankets to the thick, moist warmth of spring. Sounds, their sounds, were being made behind the bedroom door, small squeaks and bursts of laughter, soft inside sounds, like cats gurgling after food. She knew then that they had made friends again. Not as she and her playmates made friends, taking hands in the sight of the sun, but in some dark and terrifying way not possible in daylight—a business of the night.

Even though he had said that the biscuits were antediluvian and she had found the coffee intolerable, their truce had lasted through breakfast. "A magnificent day—magnificent," he had said, turning from the window and giving his wife a smart slap on the thigh. "What do you say! Shall we take Francie to the zoo?"

All morning they had been royally kind. They let her wear her scarlet jumper streaked with rabbits' hair. That gave her some color, her mother said; a good clear red seemed to take the strawiness out of her hair. Yes, said her father, more becoming all round—absolutely; not so much like a bag of bones. And now they had forgotten her entirely, which was even better. She jumped across a mossy log and could not feel her bones at all. She was smooth and all of one piece, like the sleek chipmunk racing down the lawn. She licked the last sweetness of the cream of soda from the corners of her lips, and whistled to herself.

First they went to see the hippopotamus who lived quiet like a lump of earth in a sky-green swimming pool. She could not tell why she liked him; he was really very ugly with his muddy, patchy skin and his little eyes; he blew large bubbles and had an amazingly big backside. Still, she thought she could have stayed for hours leaning her cheek against the rail and staring at the brown blob in the green water. He looked like Theodora's uncle. There was something peaceful about him. He never went anywhere. He stayed and stayed. Maybe he liked to open his eyes down there in the watery dark and see the same rough spots on the cement every day. Maybe. . . .

"The Church of England to a T," her father said. "T. S. Eliot can always be depended upon to produce the perfect simile, the simile more factual than fact, more true than truth."

"Precisely," said her mother. "But don't you think she looks a little like Emma Fitzsimmons, too?"

She sighed over her own ignorance. She had made another blunder; she had taken a she for a he. The hippopotamus became what it had been in the beginning—a sexless chunk of mud, something indefinite enough to be like an English cathedral and Emma Fitzsimmons at the same time. They walked away, and she trailed after them without looking back at the little, stupid eyes.

They went to the front of the main building where the cages were, and she followed them with an old resignation. They were like that—she had been to other zoos with them in other cities—they always wanted to spend most of the time looking at the fierce ones, the ones behind bars. Afterwards they were too tired for her animals, the gentler ones, the jittery monkeys, the shy skittish zebras, the giraffes with the seeking eyes. This particular zoo had a new pair of black leopards. At the breakfast table they had talked about that. There was thunder somewhere in the line of cages, and she could tell by their eyes that they hoped it came from one of these black leopards, that somehow it would be more precious to them if it happened to be a black leopard's roar.

The insides of all the cages had an ancient, barren, Biblical look. Each of them had the same gray stone steps and the same

stone-gray shadows. Flies could come in to sit on the tiger's moist nose and the lion's thick paw, but there was no way for the sunlight to get inside. These cages were vastly disheartening, like pictures of ruins. She kept thinking of something she had heard somewhere about lions creeping restlessly over a desert place where an old, old city had once been—a city with a wild name—Tyre, Nineveh, Babylon?

In the smoky grayness of the cage the soot-black leopards paced round and round, hissing with a noise like steam and glaring at people with their pale moonstone eyes. Her mother and father stayed as close to the cage as possible. They leaned on the railing and answered the dark creatures stare for stare. But she lagged behind in the shade of a kindly boxwood hedge and tried to think of pleasant matters: how fine the cream of soda had been, how clean the sky was, how red her jumper looked in the sun.

The roar *had* come out of those sleek and sinewy necks. Now they began it again, soft and gurgling at first, then stronger, more like a monstrous whine. She shivered and retreated against branches. The Bible had certainly gotten into the cage somehow; she saw the Devil twice, black and lithe and terrible, springing up on lean haunches, clawing at the bars.

"Primitive!" her father said. "The primal evil. In the beginning was Lucifer."

And her mother nodded and said, "Precisely. Yes, indeed."

But that would not be enough for her mother to say. Before they could leave this cage, before the pale Devil's eyes could be blotted out by some softer, more sorrowful animal stare, her mother would have to find something else, something clever. Today there was no war between them, and he would wait until she had said her say.

Meanwhile some change, disturbing and disturbingly familiar, took place behind the black bars. The leopards stopped clawing at the grating, they eased their long bodies languorously down; they paced back and forth in opposite directions, passing each other, brushing briefly against each other's sides. Their heavy paws beat softly on cement. They hissed whenever they met, but, moving apart, they made remembered

noises in their throats, gurgling sounds that belonged in the middle of the night.

“Yes . . .” the mother said, and stretched her shoulders and turned her head from side to side.

“Ah . . .” said the father, smiling with a cold, knowing mouth.

The child, watching from the hedge, knew that this wisdom between them was a secret and had to do with he-ness and she-ness; the black leopards were a he and a she; their quarrel was over, and the whole park was about to become thick and damp with a nameless thing; day was to be turned inside out with a business of the dark.

Some of the other mothers and fathers made loud conversations and began to push their children toward a low building, a delightful place where you could see Malay sun bears with crew haircuts, and raccoons hung upside down. The path looked abandoned and tawdry now, cluttered with candy wrappers and the limp ends of ice cream cones. Only the three of them stayed behind in this emptiness, watching the two black Satans, the he and the she, at their angry tryst behind the bars.

Fear drove her back into the hedge, so that the branches crackled against her face. She wished to God that she might close her eyes, but she could not close her eyes. The creatures lunged at each other, collided in midair, and fell in a wriggling heap. Their mouths were hissing and drawn back; in the undulating mass of fur, you could see the whiteness of their teeth and the redness of their gums. One of them leaped at the other, buried his teeth in a black neck, soiled the clean day, the bright park, the whole world with throaty night-sounds. . . .

“Oh, no!” she said.

Her mother called casually over her shoulder, “Don’t be silly, Frances, they’re only playing, they’re doing that for pleasure.”

“Shall we go along now?” her father asked. “I believe the show’s over. I conclude the female’s not in the mood for that particular variety of activity this afternoon.”

Her mother dawdled, thoughtful, remote, still waiting for a cleverness.

One leopard came to the edge of the cage and thrust his sticky nose between the bars, into a slant of sun. The nose was not so terrible as it had seemed in shadow; it was really more brown than black; small, darker underpatches showed through.

The mother smiled. "A bad dye-job, that nose," she said. "Doesn't it look exactly like those figured curtains that Mrs. Moss had done over?"

He laughed and said, "Absolutely. Yes, indeed." And they turned to tell her it was about time to be getting on.

By the time that they had seen the lion and the condors and had waited for twenty minutes to see whether the peacock would scream, she began to think it would be better not to visit any of the other animals; she began to wish that she could go straight home. It was true that she had wanted particularly to see the giraffe. One of her teachers in Cleveland had said that he was a very tame animal who liked people and ate nothing but green leaves. Still, he would probably not like her; she did not like herself any more; she was covered with a sick, chilly sweat, and her knees felt watery and tired.

But they were in such a good humor. They had decided to have supper in a restaurant close by, and they were not hungry as yet, and it would be utterly stupid to run home. Didn't she want to see the giraffe? Hadn't she said so this morning at the breakfast table? Well, look, there will be plenty of time to rest before supper. And here is a bench right in front of the giraffe's cage, and isn't that fortunate, and now all of us can sit down. . . .

For a long time she did not look at the giraffe. He was there somewhere, behind a wire fence in a small, sandy wilderness broken only by two young trees whose leaves were still green. But she did not care to see him. She sat on the end of the bench and leaned her head against the wood and spread her handkerchief over her eyes to keep out the sun. She would often sit like this, creating a closed circle of dimness for herself, feeling the cloth move up and down against her cheeks

and eyelids, gently, with her breath. She called this "making a place"; wherever you went, you could always get a handkerchief, and then you could have a place. Under the handkerchief there was a warmth and a glow, and she was far away from *them* and from everything. Their voices, talking at the other end of the bench, seemed to be coming from a separate star.

"Concerning the giraffe," he was saying, "he's one of God's most witless creatures."

She sighed under the handkerchief. She was glad to have gotten that straight from the start; this giraffe was a he.

"Absolutely witless, and so mild that he probably wouldn't swallow a fly if it walked halfway down his tongue. He's herbivorous, you know. Eats green leaves—"

"And grass?" said the mother-voice, eager to get its two cents' worth of curious learning in.

"Not grass. No, indeed. Absolutely nothing off the ground." He was masculine and lordly now. "Look at him, and your common sense will tell you why."

"That silly neck? Too much trouble to get it down?"

"Trouble, my darling? Nothing so minor as trouble, I can assure you. A giraffe with his neck down is as good as a dead giraffe. He can't get it up again with any speed at all. That's why he's thirsty most of the time. He's afraid to drink. He goes for days without water, and you can imagine, in equatorial heat . . . ."

She knew that word from her fourth-grade geography book. In the still place that she had made for herself, she imagined equatorial heat. There was a long, tan stretch of sandy earth, covered with smoky, weedy plumes. Here and there were little trees with a few fine leaves. For a while it was completely empty and still, and the giraffes came down. They came softly, gently, walking through weeds on their delicate feet. The great red sun burned upon them. All the lengths of their necks were dry with thirst, dry as sand. But they did not shove each other. They waited courteously, and each one had his small green spray and sucked the moisture out of it, as she had sucked a healing bitterness from the boxwood leaf.

"After a while, of course, the thirst gets to be too much for

them. They have to go down to the water hole. They go in droves, for moral support, I suppose, because, of course, they're utterly useless to each other. And then, when they've got their necks down and their tongues in the water, their backs are an invitation to whatever happens to be around. The tigers leap at them—”

And the black leopards, too, she thought.

She waited until her mouth stopped shaking and then took the handkerchief away from her face.

“Had a nice rest?” her mother said. “See, all you needed was a little quiet. And now, what are you going to do?”

“I think I'll go and look at the giraffe.”

“Do, by all means.”

She went slowly up to the cage, hoping that the giraffe would come close enough for her to see his eyes.

The place where the giraffe lived was more open than she had supposed. They knew he was a mild creature, and they had not closed him in too much. The room between the wire fence and the iron railing was only the length of her arm, and the diamonds of space between the crisscross wires were as big as her hand. Other children were standing close to the rail with their mothers and fathers, and nobody looked troubled or afraid. A dark Italian guard in a visored cap stood by, shaking his head at a little boy who looked as if he might throw a handful of peanuts between the wires.

It would have been better, she thought, if the guard had not been there. She recalled the time when, in a Philadelphia museum, just such a cap had borne down upon her because she had touched the toe of a kind, plump Virgin made of painted wood. She consoled herself with the thought that she had no peanuts or anything that could be mistaken for peanuts, and she leaned her elbows on the railing and stared into the giraffe's place, the quiet square of tan that had been made for him—in an alien country, to be sure, but at least away from black leopards and such. He was on the other side of the sandy stretch, beyond the fragile tree. She could not see him very well, and she amused herself with wondering whether he had to get his neck down often here. Maybe the people in charge

of the zoo knew how hard it was for him to do that. Maybe they held his bucket up to him on a stick. And if they didn't, maybe they should be told in an anonymous letter, and then maybe they would.

While she was making up an anonymous letter, all the other children drew in their breaths and said "Oh!" and she knew that the giraffe was coming from the other side of his place. She lifted her face and saw him, even taller than she had expected, his neck so long, his delicate nose held so high, that a person could imagine him nibbling at stars. He walked very slowly, with a graceful forward lurch. He made no clouds of dust with his little elegant feet. Now it seemed to her that she had never known anything about a giraffe before. She had thought he would be spotted, brown on beige. Instead, his colors were laid upon him in fine, soft squares. The closer he came, the more she delighted in this coloring. It was as if his hide had been made in two layers, one creamy and pale, the other crisp and reddish brown. Maybe the dark upper layer had been too fragile for the equatorial heat. It had cracked into blocks, like the glaze on the Chinese pottery she had seen at Mrs. Moss's house. It had cracked, and the tan under layer was foaming through. Such a soft belly too, that creamy tan; and, flashing past her, moist with a dream of plentiful springs, two great brown eyes. . . .

"Oh, my darling, oh, my beautiful," she said, holding the iron rail in her fists and pulling herself back and forth for pure joy.

It was as if he had heard her voice. He did not stay on the other side. He did not stop to sniff at the small tree. He made his swaying, processional way all round the inner side of the barrier of wire. She pressed hard against the rail. The other children, the guard, the two sitting on the bench behind her, the park, the whole world fell away. Her arms went up in a gesture of utter gratefulness. The giraffe had stopped just in front of her; he was looking at her; she was drowned in his sweet, wet glance. A warm brown well of sorrow and gentleness closed over her, and she was forever safe, everlastingly beloved.

"Oh, my sweet giraffe," she said, straining her body toward him across the railing, stretching the tips of her fingers to the highest wire she could hope to touch. Then she told him, not with her voice, only with her lips, that he was all the impossible things: all the friends from whom she had been taken, all the hands she had never touched, father and mother, unborn brother and sister, dear love, dear sad love.

There was an amazed chatter among the others around the railing. It was really remarkable, now wasn't it? The giraffe wanted to make friends with the little girl in the red jumper. Just look, he was stepping backward, he was getting his head down as far as he could, he was thrusting his soft, drooping nose into one of the spaces between the wires. Even so, they could not quite meet, they could not quite touch. There were two inches of space between the tender nose and the raised hand.

"Do watch yourself, darling," a stout lady said. "You might lose a finger. You never can tell."

"Not him, not him," she chanted, swaying on her toes. "He's herbivorous, he never eats anything but leaves, and look at his eyes, he's good, he's kind."

He strove, and she strove with him, sensing the rasp of the wire against his nose. Her fingers trembled with the strain; pain ran round the socket of her shoulder like a ripple of fire.

Another breathless "Oh!" rose out of the throats of the watchers. The giraffe had found a way. He was bridging the empty space by thrusting out his tongue. It came out slowly, clean and moist and beautiful. It was a pale mauve color, and it turned silvery in the sunlight. It was warm. Its warmth and wetness advanced upon her, reached her, bestowed a long kiss on the center of her palm.

Then something shot across the wonder and the delight. She did not know at first what had come between her and her love; she knew only that the love was over, and that now she must feel what she had always felt at the end of any love—loneliness and shame. The dark hand that had shoved the giraffe's nose back was the guard's hand. The shadow of his visored cap was lying near her on cement.

"You mustn't do that, sister," the guard said.

She did not dare to look about her; there were so many staring eyes. She put her head down so far that her chin rested against the front of her jumper. "He wouldn't have bitten me," she said through the cottony mass of ache in her throat. "He was only licking my hand. He eats leaves. He doesn't bite."

"No, that's right. You're a smart girl. You know your animals, all right. He wouldn't hurt you, but you might hurt him."

I? Oh, no, how could that be, with so much love?

"You see, he's a very sensitive fellow. One little germ, and he's a goner. Now, I'm not saying your hands aren't clean. But you can't see germs. With germs, you never know."

*They* had risen and were coming up behind her. Her shoulders hunched against them. Their steps were soft upon the grass. And why was it so terrible? Why did she think that they had white, moonstone eyes?

"You must excuse her. Really, I thought she had better sense than that," her mother said.

She walked in front of them, away from the giraffe's home. She kept her hand closed in a fist. The moisture was still there; she still carried his kiss. All down the long path, longer because of the looks that were being turned upon her, she felt the wet glance trying to follow her. She wanted to turn to answer it, but her head was down. She had been to the deep brown pool and had swallowed her sweet drink. But now the time of drinking was over, and she could not raise her head.

"You certainly made an ass of yourself over that animal," said her father.

"But doesn't she always?" her mother said.

For weeks after that, she went about asking people questions about germs. She looked up the word in forbidding encyclopedias in unfamiliar libraries. She spent her candy money on the morning and evening papers and looked wildly up and down the columns, expecting every moment to see that the giraffe had died. Then one day she actually found an article about the giraffe. She saw his picture first and felt the cold squeeze of fear around her heart. But it was nothing; the giraffe

was not dead; only he was a little unhappy because his keepers had not been able to find him a mate.

"I am your mate and your sister and your mother," she said to the picture, cutting it out with a borrowed pair of scissors in the art room at school. The teacher gave her a piece of red cardboard to paste it on and told her that it would make a beautiful bookmark. She pretended that it was a bookmark and kept it in her room in a story book.

But then they moved again, to a far city, and in the confusion the book was lost. Nothing was left but the remembrance of the silvery tongue brushing against her palm. Her mother, coming in to see that she was well covered on the winter nights, wondered why she always fell asleep with her hand pushed hard against her lips.

# *Child and the Bird*

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*by MARGARET SHEDD*

**H**OW long will the lights be off, Mother?"  
She answered, "A while, but the dark is nice, isn't it, Kathie?"

The child's hand trembled where it lay in hers, and the child's voice answered softly, but doubtfully, "Yes," and the sirens continued to make their strident quaver.

Kathie sat on a little chair at her knees. The child-body did not lean against hers; it shot straight up into the dark. But Kathie's hand curled warm inside her mother's.

"Would you rather go in off the porch, dear? We can turn on the lights and play the piano."

The house was ready for this sudden darkness, black oilcloth and everything. But they had thought they would rather sit on the front porch with the lights off. Maybe that was silly. If it had been a real raid of course they would have run into the basement with the mice and little roaches. But this was only practice for death. The planes' busy humming voices added verisimilitude though, wings close round.

"No, Mommy, I don't want to go in. I like it better out here in the vines. Don't you?"

She had often thought that, but she didn't know Kathie did too: that the porch would always be the safest place because those vines grew over it out of the warm earth's heart, sweet to smell, tangled and strong. Even in the now gray light, mitigated from stark black, they could half-see, half-sense the merry little dance of the vines, rhythm just stronger than a quiver, cape jasmine mixed with the silent tendrils of wistaria, and both obedient to the faintest breeze.

Up high in the vines there were nests to which some little

dark birds returned year after year, mending them every time. So the vine was both warp and woof of lovely life, smell, and the song and growth. The seeking curled ends of wistaria grew while they danced, grew even during the blackout maybe. And the birds who lived there were pale blue eggs, first, and then they were long necks and noise, and then they were gone.

“Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might . . . but, Mommy, it isn’t a star because it won’t stand still.”

“It must be another plane.”

“But why is it so high up?”

“Watch, it’s playing a game.”

“With the stars?”

“No, with the searchlights. See, it’s coming lower now.”

“It’s dancing,” said Kathie with finality.

In the banners that striped the sky (and how had man ever learned, her heart asked, to make such sharp beacons that tore night’s soft cover into shreds?) that space-flung little thing poised and lunged; and the bright fingers followed it, pointed it out, more than that, kept it at the absolute dead center of time and radiance. The plane was as beautiful as a moth and as austere as a hawk and it glittered brighter than a prophet’s word and the city was dead beneath it. Black earth, and up there the challenge, set not in letters but in light, all the beauty and destructiveness of reason crisscrossed athwart a patient sky, a question to tear the heart out and composed of glow, glimmer, gleam, beam, all lucence. But at the point of convergence, at the very core of light there should have been the answer. There was.

Not this time. This one was ours.

The triangles and rhomboids shifted into other impersonal forms. The sky was only the neutral substance between the fingers of the searchlights. The sky was void.

But on the porch it was another thing, she thought. No straight-cut angles in the dark; old chairs serene and shabby and the whispering curve of vines and the curve of soft human bodies, child and mother. She remembered the texture of another scene. Once they had been stranded in a boat off a stormy

shore. The motors had simply ceased, and finally they had launched an outboard dory filled with women and their babies. That shell was weighted to the rim and the shifting of a restless child could have tipped it over, but the quiet pulse of motherhood held the lifeboat steady and there was a murmur of low voices that kept singing and talking against the sea's uproar. She and Kathie had been in the prow. The waves washed over them but their security was in each other. And it seemed to her that against the mothers' bending backs and the children cupped between lap and breast, against those parallel body curves great and small, death must recede diminished. And it had; that time. Now, too, peace in the shadow of the vines. Love was surely stronger than searchlights. She relaxed and breathed the jasmine.

But Kathie had not relaxed. The little pulsing hand, that had nestled like a bird in safety, was withdrawn, and Kathie stood up and walked toward the straight shafts of light. The mother got up too and walked beside her daughter, and at the railing they watched the sky together. There were the airplanes, many now, diverting themselves with mathematical élan, and she wondered in panic if this was really different; a sea, a storm, disease, but was this something else invincible?

"We can't hurt them, can we, Mommy? But they can hurt us," Kathie said all on one fast intaken breath.

The child had drawn an unspoken word from her mother's mind, as often before, but this one must be denied. "Oh, no, Kathie, no; they won't hurt us," she cried, although she knew this might not be true, or not true another time. But that tense little body beside her had lost laughter and peace to those airplanes in the sky, and it called to her for protection. Even if the world was breaking into blood-soaked fragments, or all the more so, there still remained the grave lilt of child haunch and the shoulder pure and soft.

Anyway Kathie had not heard her; the only thing the child could hear or see or feel were those airplanes. One of her hands shot out at an angle from the wrist; hand a flat surface that zoomed up as far as the arm could reach.

"See how it goes, Mommy, see!" Kathie's hand echoed the

gyrations in the sky. "Here's its wings," she exulted, hands joined flat on top of each other, thumbs out on each side for the wing spread, and the middle fingers forward for the nose.

Kathie could not possibly stand still, of course. The dance of the bombing plane carried her all over the porch. It swooped up to the top of extravagant rolls and power-dived down to the very roof tops. Those metal ones aloft were not so animated as this of flesh; they contented themselves with giving the searchlights a chase; they played games, slipping out of broad highways of light to flash up at some new-formed cross-road. Up there it was a rehearsal, most brilliant. But here on the dark porch there was a real battle, for self-protection, the mother knew that. Here was a little girl, not six, with brown bangs across her forehead and shining brown eyes eager to meet everything including death; and her mother knew it was because Kathie was defenseless that she danced. Breathless she danced destruction in order to forestall it.

"They can't possibly run away," Kathie chanted in her savage little voice, "because I come right down on top of them and shoot them with one million machine guns. *Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-aht. . . .*" And they were riddled, not a shred left whole, the cats and dogs and mothers and dolls and babies. She sped up again and leapt from cloud to cloud. Then came the power-dive, its child-sound not speech, a humming drone contained within the mouth, "*Eeeeeee-yaahn!*" but in its token way a perfect symbol of man's new fall from heaven. *Eeeeeee-yaahn*, and every house under the old porch chairs was shattered.

And now in a mighty climax of supreme annihilation she jumped into a rocker and onto its arm, and then ready for the swooping final kill upward swung her airplane-hand backward into the vines. And a bird flew out.

With that tumult all around it was small wonder he left his home, but instead of going outdoors he flew into the porch itself, and he brushed past Kathie in his flight. The child heard and felt him at the same moment. Right then her war was over and she was once more a very little girl, not six, trying to balance herself on the arm of a wildly rocking chair.

"It's a bird!"

She said it in pure love and wonder, as though this thing whose wing had touched her face must be at very least a breast-feathered angel, bird or angel hardly any different. And too the voice said, and easily, not like an actor's or a radio announcer's or even like a poet's voice, but like a child's, that safety and leaf and wing and wind known every day are magic, that all wonderful things are ordinary.

And Kathie must have been right about this bird, because he flew past her unafraid and then landed on the floor and walked right into the house as if he had business there. They could see him, a little shadow in the dim light. He hopped on the porch and then silently through the doorway onto the floor of the hall and toward the stairs. Wonderful.

But to the mother that noiseless invasion seemed something very different. She had known the dance was right, the way children are always right. But that little bird, why must he come to interrupt them, fly into their vine-wrapped hiding, into their house? Her heart trembled in some old terror, faint clear voice of an alarm bell brought from far, far off on windless air, bird in the house, bird in the house, wings battering at neat glassed and washed windows, an echo of vagrant words, "means death," and "when we woke a bird was in his room and that evening my son died." Meaningless lore in the steel age of reason? But the overtones still murmured, and strong steel wings of death danced up there and the little frantic dance of protection had been stopped by other wings. The bird, the little dark angel, had come into her house.

Kathie was saying, "Mother, I want to see what the birdie's doing." Kathie, who was balancing on the rocking chair as if she was ready to fly away that very minute, calling softly, "Mommy, help me down quick, so I can go and see."

She went to Kathie and lifted her down. She would have liked to keep her arms around her child forever. She did not want to let her go. But she knew now that neither vines entwined, nor arms, would be enough. In Poland mothers covered their children with their own bodies when the machine gunners flew down over the potato fields; soft useless shield, she knew that now. And the rocking chair still swayed from

the release of Kathie's weight, but that moment when she had lifted her daughter down, just past, was past indeed, gone, only a white remembrance.

They came through the doorway and closed the door behind them. She wanted light, and she turned on every switch at hand, which brought to instant bloom the warm rose color of walls and of the carpet. And there was the little bird, walking up the stairs. But he was no special color, not even gray or brown or dull green. He was neutral, nothing, nondescript, and there must be thousands like him. He was not flying or bustling. No indeed, he hopped from step to step up. And up and up.

But there were some special things that caught the mother's eye: she saw his beak, too predatory for such a tame small thing. She saw his wings folded neatly out of the way as if he really belonged in houses and not wandering through the black night. And she saw his little claws so sure of themselves on the rose-carpeted stairs, hop, hop.

Kathie stood with one hand resting on the banister as far as she could reach; then she started up the staircase.

The child's feet were not as silent as the bird's. Her feet made a certain gentle noise, a muffled bump against the steps, because she was in a hurry to get there. At the landing she turned and looked down at her mother. "I have to see what he's doing, Mommy, are you coming?" Her hand on the railing boosted herself up and she was gone.

The mother took the whole flight in one rush to the top.

It was silent up there. Where was he? Not in her room and not in the study. The other doors were closed, except Kathie's.

They went in together. "Let's not scare him," whispered Kathie, "I'll turn on the light."

The mother said nothing. She was waiting to see where the bird would be. He was sitting on the toy shelves. The light startled him and he shook his feathers, not at all ruffled, just a cursory adjustment of his dark raiment; but she saw that beneath the feathers he was only a slight body, itself pitiful. Maybe he was afraid under that bold presumptive air. Or was he waiting to see what she would do? Well, she wanted him gone, and quickly. She wanted to get up and drive him out.

But Kathie was saying, all on one breath, "Mother, Mother, can he stay, can he? Will he live here always with me?"

And she listened to her own voice answer the child reasonably. For, argued her heart, after all, this scene is composed only of a little daughter and a stray bird and a room and a shelf of toys; winged death is not really here, is it? Her voice was saying, "Kathie, I don't think he'll want to stay. He lives outside, you know. Let's open your window and see if he wants to go home."

He was in no hurry. He ruffled his feathers some more. Finally he got up, and flew to the window, and away. Kathie leaned far out to watch him.

Out there everything was over. The all clear signal had sounded. It was a heavy moonless night with the searchlights off. The airplanes were going back to their homes. They were very audible but were swallowed in the darkness. One flew so low they caught a glint of its wings. The bird was really gone though.

Kathie said, "I don't think he'll fly far away, do you, Mother? I think he'll surely come back to see me."

Again she answered calmly, but she gathered these words from out the night before her, "Yes, Kathie, he may come back."

They stood at the window, both very straight, small and tall, not linked by hand or arm, but side by side together.

## Women and War

**F**OR all women whose men have passed through the canals of war, Kay Boyle has captured the poignance of the first good-bye. She writes with the skill and craftsmanship that her mastery of the short story assures, and with the knowledge of the heart.

For all the women who have followed their private or corporal or captain about the country, Josephine Johnson has captured the essence of the rented room. Her husband, too, has served overseas; her writer's gift has been cherished since *Now in November* won her the Pulitzer Prize in 1934.

For all women who must suffer the agony of final loss, Bessie Breuer offers an inspiring and beautiful suggestion of adjustment. She read an announcement that a brilliant young artist who had been in command of a Navy cutter, "one of the rare beings," was missing and must be presumed lost. "He had a wife and two small children. What had induced a young man with all this investment in life, and with his rich talents, to volunteer for such desperate duty? I thought about him all the time, I was too constricted to write to his wife, but I wrote this story. I hope that it will have meaning for any woman whose life is a time of death."



# *The Canals of Mars*

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*by KAY BOYLE*

**S**HE was sitting on the bench, waiting under the park trees, when he came out of the draft board office on the other side of Columbus Avenue and made for the curb. He had the whitish raincoat on, and his head was bare, and he started to cross at once, not even looking at the lights, stepping between the cars and the careening taxis with his eyes fixed on her as he came. The first time she had seen him—five years ago at the other end of the Sacher bar in Vienna—she had thought at once the same thing of him as she was thinking now: that he couldn't be anything but English. In spite of the purely Austrian blood in his veins, she had kept on thinking it of him in ski huts in the Alps when he would come in and brush the fresh snow from his shoulders, with his eyes looking for her; or in restaurants, or in city swimming pools, or on Mediterranean beaches; or when she had waited for him on café terraces, and seen him coming at last down the streets of Geneva or Paris or Marseilles. The mustache was clipped short and straight as the English military wear them, the cheekbones were narrow and high with the color of weather on them, and he made his way now through the traffic with the same degree of casual pride as would an Englishman better than six feet tall and with broad, sensitive shoulders and the traditional reticence in his bones. When he reached the bench where she waited, he sat down quickly.

"I've got until half-past three," he said. On the street before them, the rain was just beginning to fall.

"And then where do you go?" she said. She looked at the side of his face, at the hair a little light with sunburn above the ear, and the lean shaved cheek, and the pulse that beat

incredibly soft and tender in his throat beneath the jaw's straight bone. Five years, she thought, and I'll never get over it, never. Every time I look at him, I know I wasted twenty years of life because I wasn't sitting somewhere waiting for him to cross a street or a glacier or a mountain and sit down.

"Then I check in at store seven at Pennsylvania Station," he said. He looked at his watch. "It's just eleven. That gives us four and a half hours," and he shook the cuff of his raincoat down across his wrist again.

"Perhaps we should do something special. I mean, perhaps we ought to do something rather important," she said. She watched the rain falling fine as mist before them in the street. "I mean, like going up the Statue of Liberty, or something. You've had your two weeks' furlough, and now you're going to be a soldier, so there we are. If you make a sort of ceremony out of the last hours together, it usually makes it go better." If I just don't look at him, she thought, I can go on forever talking like this. "The time you took the boat for Casablanca, there was the night before," she said.

"Yes," he said quietly. "I know."

"There were the perfumed sheets," she said. "There was the orange satin cover on the bed. She wanted transient trade. She didn't like married people at all except for the price they'd pay to have a place to spend the night."

"All the way to Trinidad, whatever wind was blowing, I smelled that violent perfume," he said.

"But still it was something special," she insisted.

"Yes," he said, looking at the rain, "it was something special."

"Can you only go as far as her wrist, or can you go up inside her palm and into the torch?" she said. She looked at his hand with the blue veins and the sunburn on it, lying bleakly on the raincoat's cloth on his knee.

"You mean in the Statue of Liberty?" He turned his face to hers, and, as their eyes met for a moment, she saw the look of despair upon his brow. "Four hours go so quickly. Perhaps we could just sit and have a drink somewhere," he said.

Yes, we could do that, we could have a drink, she thought. We could face each other across the half-dark of an alcove's

table, and after a Scotch the words would start crying out loud like the drowning to one another. There's certainly nothing to stop us from sitting down and having a drink or two somewhere together, and then simply letting it begin. For a little while we could stave it off by talking about the glass sticks that nobody wants to disturb the heart of his drink for him, or we could put nickels into the juke box and talk about last year's tunes. Or else we could stop the travesty of uproariousness at once by starting making plans together, plotting the precise design to defeat the absolute muting of each other's voices, contriving a way to go on saying the things we haven't said often enough in five years of time.

"Perhaps we ought to try doing something better than that," she said, and she felt the rain on her hair now. "The planetarium's behind us. We could go in and have a look at the stars."

"Yes," he said, but he was watching the two soldiers who were coming toward them, his eyes fixed closely on them as they passed the bench. "They have shoes like mine on," he said, "so perhaps they'll let me keep mine." He thrust one leg out from under his coat and looked down at his shoe with the strap across the tongue of it and the buckle on the side. "I want to keep them. I don't want to have to wear shoes without memories," he said.

"The heels are worn sideways," she said. "That wouldn't be regulation."

"I like them that way," he said, still looking at his shoe. "I like the things we did to wear them sideways."

"All around the edge," she was saying, "you can see the skyline of New York exactly as if it were the skyline, and as if it were early dusk, with no lights in the windows yet." He was running one finger along the thinning sole. "And after awhile, whichever would be the first star at this time of year, that star comes out, and the sky goes slowly darker the way the sky would go tonight if the rain stopped." And to herself she said in silence: There isn't going to be any tonight; everything that has been night and day or summer or winter is going to

end at half-past three. "And you sit there in the dark," she said, "and the constellations come out in their proper order."

"All right," he said, and he stood up and looked across the bright green grass at the back of the museum, his eyes on the planetarium's dome. He turned the whitish coat-collar up against the rain, and then he drew her arm through his arm. "It's quite a monument," he said, as they started off along the path with the rain falling on them. He looked ahead at the museum. "It's quite a memorial to my going away," he said.

"We'll see the dead green canals of Mars," she said, and she felt his arm lying in peace and quiet against her.

"They'll be something special to take to Australia or Alaska all right," he said.

"The other times you went away, you didn't have anything half as good to take with you," she said in rebuke to him. "The time you went to concentration camp, you had nothing but the bad coffee at five in the morning."

"I had a waltz," he said. "I had a waltz the night before with you. Perhaps I ought to go out waltzing this time," he said, "the way all good Austrians go."

"Where would they put a waltz in the Pennsylvania Station?" she said. She thought of the people that might be there, the mothers, the wives, the sisters, the girls, with their handkerchiefs held against their mouths. I'm not just one woman taking it alone, she said in silence. I'm a lot of women closing their teeth hard on what they're not going to let make any sound.

"That time, I had a waltz," he was saying as they walked, "and because they wouldn't let you on the platform, I made up a little group to see me off. I had Héloïse and Abélard," he said, "and King Arthur in tourney dress." There was the planetarium's dome and the closed glass doors before them. The sign on its pedestal said: "Next performance at 2:30," and they walked away. "I had Aldous Huxley," he said. "I had him walking down the platform, just tipping his hat and smiling slightly through the window at me. But underneath that correct manner there was something else: there was an acute expression of grief in his eyes."

"I don't think he's capable of it," she said as they crossed the street. "How was King Arthur taking it?"

"He had what I should have liked to borrow to go off with," he said. "He had all his nobility showing in his face. When the train started going off with me and the other prisoners and the gendarmes in it, his lips didn't move, but his whole face seemed to alter, you know, the way a statue's does when the light changes on it. Have I told you all this before?"

"No," she said. "You simply went through the gate with the gendarmes. For me, it ended there—"

"I don't know why I wanted Héloïse and Abélard to be there," he said, "but I wanted them badly. I kept watching through the window of the compartment for them, just wanting to see them come, holding arms like we are, maybe as some kind of proof that, in spite of the *Historia Calamitatum*, people do manage to survive. Even as brother and sister, I wanted them, I mean, even with the other feeling gone, and only the tomblike devotion left. But they didn't get there until the last minute," he said. "She came running ahead of him down the platform, looking in the car windows for me. Abélard was terribly nervous; I think he was really annoyed at having to be associated with anyone in my position. He stood back, away from the train, distinguished and embittered looking, snapping at her from time to time. I didn't have handcuffs on, of course, but still he didn't like the situation." They had turned down Broadway now, and the rain was falling hard. "I thought until the very end that he might forget his pride and look at me for a moment as one doomed man at another, but he was past that, he was even past that. I should have known him in the *Notre Dame* period," he said, and then they saw the moving-picture theatre before them.

"It's *Pépé le Moko*," she said quickly, and they stopped and looked at the face of Jean Gabin in the frames. "It's in French," she said. "I saw it in Toulon after you went away. It's like walking into a bistro and sitting down and hearing all the right things said. It's something you ought to take to Alaska with you. It's even better than the canals of Mars," she said.

He paid the money out, and they walked abruptly into the

dark together, feeling their way into seats at the back; and they sat down with their coats on still and looked at the illuminated screen. They sat there silent a little while, watching the canoe trip through the Adirondacks unfold before them, the waterfalls drop without hope to the sun-dappled basins, the needled branches hang low upon the moss, the rapids pass, the pines stand up in melancholy.

"It's a quarter past twelve," he said, in a low voice to her, and their shoulders were touching in the dark.

"In just a minute it'll come," she said in a whisper. "When this thing's finished, you'll see. I walked in off the quays at Toulon one afternoon when I didn't know whether the Germans had caught up with you yet or not, and there it was," she said. "The speech and the characters are so good that it couldn't matter when you came in on them—I mean, the same way it doesn't matter when you come into actual people's lives because you always know right away, even if you come into the middle of people's lives, exactly what they are and what they've always been."

"This," he said in the darkness, "is the picture about canoe trips which should put an end to all canoe trips."

"In just a minute," she said in a quick whisper, "you'll see. Pépé's the tough guy, the bad egg, the *maquereau* who knows all about love from the beginning. He's out of Montmartre, serving a life term in prison in Algiers. Or perhaps it's Morocco, or perhaps not quite a term for life. But it's the shape of love you get. I don't know how you get it. Perhaps there isn't any love in it, but still something like it is there."

"What if we just went somewhere quietly and had a drink?" he said to the sight of the man and woman stroking the canoe across the sunlit screen.

"In just a minute it will change," she said softly. "It's something you can take away with you and keep under glass. Pépé escapes, he hides in the Casbah, and there's one line you can keep forever with you. It's when he's kissing the girl who's come from Paris, and he knows he never can go home. He doesn't tell her that she is the lilacs in the Bois," she whispered, "or the *marronniers* along the boulevards. He says, '*tu es le*

*métro*,' and he says it the way no one's ever said anything before."

"It's one o'clock," he said in the dark, "and they haven't reached civilization yet."

"This can't go on forever," she said.

"It can go on until they pitch camp," he said. "It'll have to go on until she's made the coffee and cooked potatoes in the ash." He had got to his feet now, and he said: "You wait here while I ask. I don't want to have to see them paddling into the sunset." She watched him going, the silhouette tall and somehow vulnerable against the rapids' brilliant summer light. When he came back, he leaned over her in the darkness. "We'll go to the Pennsylvania Station and have a drink," he said. "Gabin goes on at half-past two."

The bar there was shaped like a clover leaf, and men were thick around it, Army men and Navy men with their packs at their feet. There was one table left, a small one by the plate-glass window that looked on the arcade, and they sat down and ordered sandwiches and Scotch, and their eyes met suddenly, and he reached over and took her hand.

"I know it's impossible to make any plans ahead," he said, "but if there's any way to telephone, I will. If you'll just be there almost all the time, I'll try to get through to you. Maybe they let visitors come on Sunday," he said, the conniving against silence and time and distance, as they had known it in other countries, beginning stubbornly again.

"Don't make yourself write too much," she said, and she watched the people passing in the arcade. "I mean, the routine will be hard. Don't feel you have to do it."

The food and drink had come now, and they bit into their sandwiches and drank the Scotch-and-soda fast.

"I'll try to telephone or telegraph at once," he said. "Only don't expect it." It was only when he glanced down for a moment that she could bear to look now at his forehead and his eyebrows and his hair.

"This isn't like the other times," she said, and the first Scotch was spreading its weakness in her. "This time you're not just one man bearing the burden alone of what you've decided to

do. There's a national sanction to it. This time you're not an outcast any more."

"Two more," he said to the waiter, and he pointed to the empty glasses.

"This time it's different for me, too," she said. "I'm not just one woman keeping her mouth shut about what her husband's doing. I'm Russian women and English women and French women," she said, and she heard the sound of it rising foolish and high.

"You're the canals of Mars and the Casbah," he said, and because she could not look at him, she closed her hand tight in her pocket and looked straight at the shaved neck of a sailor who stood drinking at the bar. "I don't know exactly at what age one starts putting the thing together," he had begun saying across the table to her, and now there was something else in his voice, and she knew it was this he had been wanting a long time to say. "Perhaps we began putting it together younger over there," he said, "because over there you had to know it young in order to know by what means you could survive. You decided young, and when you were young still you put that kind of armor on you, link by link—I mean, the sort of contraption of ideals, or dreams, or merely exact distinctions, and once you had it clear, you had it for life, and there was no way to get from under it or to set it aside."

The second Scotch came, and he took a swallow of it, and his eyes were fixed, grave and deliberate, on her face. "And then the real trouble began," he said. "I mean, the real struggle was to get it out of the realm of vision or poetry, and give it an act at last. You could write things about what you believed, or dream things about it, and there lay the ideal so pure and remote in you that you could deceive yourself into thinking that it would survive alone. But it can't survive alone, and for a long time you can't find the act to give it for survival. But now suddenly it's happened," he said. "It happened to me the way it happened to everybody else standing up there having a drink in uniform—we were suddenly given the outer trappings for the thing in which we had believed. It's something like kneeling down and being knighted," he said, saying it quietly and

soberly, and he ordered two more drinks for them. "It'll be a quarter to three in a minute," he said.

They went down the first flight on the escalator, and the second flight they walked down, and there they saw all the other men with the zipper canvas satchels in their hands. He went through the door of store seven, and it closed behind him, and through the top pane of glass she could see his head and shoulders moving across the room. Beyond the store, five or six hundred men were standing behind the iron fence, and in a moment he too was there among them, with his little bag hanging in his hand. He put the bag and his raincoat down, and his eyes went quickly over the people outside the barrier, looking for her, and then he walked across to the edge, where some of the other men stood already, saying the last words to the families that had come to see them go. He put his hand through the bars and touched her sleeve, and the things the whisky was murmuring in them were the things they did not say.

"I don't see Aldous Huxley around anywhere," she said in a bright, strange voice to him. He stood close, with the bars between them, twisting the ring on her finger and looking at her face.

Behind him, a draftee in a gray, silky, summer suit got up on a bench in the enclosure, wavering uncertainly above the humbly standing or seated others, and began to speak. He was not a young man, and his paunch was large, and the drink was hot and tight in his face, and as he swayed above them, he cried the words of his farewell speech aloud.

"Friends, countrymen, and slackers!" he cried. "There aren't five ways of doing your duty, there aren't even four ways, there's only one way! You take a drink, and then you do it! You take a drink—" he shouted, but now the sergeant had put his hand up and helped him down.

"This time there'll be furloughs," she said through the bars. "You'll have good food—and then they have musical shows, you know, they have famous actresses and dances and things."

"Yes," he said quietly on the other side. "I know." Behind him in the enclosure the men were forming into lines, and he turned his head and looked at them. "This must be it," he said.

He looked for his raincoat and bag again, and he picked them up, and then he set off with the others walking two by two. The waiting families had not begun to move yet, but the woman pressed close beside her called out in a strong, fearless voice: "Good-by, Mike! You show them what you're made of!" She turned, with her head up, and looked quickly at the other women. "That's my little brother," she said, and tears were standing in her eyes.

And now the women and the men started walking along each side of the iron bars, the women walking at the same pace the coupled men walked toward departure with their satchels in their hands and their eyes turning back to see. As they rounded the pillar at the corner before the descent, the families ceased to call aloud; there was no sound left but that of the men quickly marching. It was not until they reached the head of the stairs that the three Italian women broke through the line and flung themselves forward—perhaps grandmother, wife, sweetheart, sister, or mother—shouting aloud their pain. They fell upon the little man in the summer suit as he passed, short, heavy women in silk dresses and high heels, with no hats, no veils, no gloves to mask their anguish, not whisky but merely the passionate flesh betraying the grief of nights and days they could not and would not bear. The little man flung out his short arms in one ludicrous, despairing gesture to them, and then he went suddenly down the stairs with the others. And perhaps it is like that, she thought as she ran on, dry-eyed among the women, perhaps it is like that that men want their women to roar out their good-by.

He was just ahead now, with his height and the weathered look of his skin singling him out, and the raincoat slung white across his shoulder, and they were going fast. He looked back once, and the lips did not move, and she ran futilely and wildly as the others ran, tripping in haste across their feet. She thought of King Arthur, and the face altering like a statue's face when the light changes on it. This time it is different, she thought; this time it isn't just one man taking nothing but his own lonely honor with him; and then he too went down the stairs.

# *The Rented Room*

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*by JOSEPHINE W. JOHNSON*

**T**HEY came to Denver on a cold raw day with rain coming in freezing veils down the mountain. "Where to, lady?"

"2129 East 19th Street."

"Where is Daddy?" Martin asked.

"Daddy is at the soldiers' house."

Martin accepted this as he accepted most things. Grandmaw's house. The soldiers' house. Mama-and-Martin's house. . . . Mama-and-Martin's house was an amorphous and shifting shape. Red brick houses, scaly white houses, houses with porches, houses with petunias, houses with iceboxes, and houses without—houses connected by webs of railroad track across two-thirds of a continent.

2129 East 19th. Mrs. McNary's apartments. Elizabeth saw without surprise, with a sense of familiarity, the vase of grass and paper flowers in the hall, the stained glass window on the stair, and the row of little mailboxes. One without a name. Mrs. McNary had come limping down the black worn staircase, in a flowered housecoat whose buttons strained to hide her tired pink slip, her wide, rheumatic flesh. "These stairs!" she said. "I had a stroke a week ago. You're Mrs. Welles, and that's the little boy." She looked at Martin speculatively, as though figuring how high his fingermarks would spread along the wallpaper.

But the fierceness ended in a vague, flesh-buried smile. Her breath came up deep and laboriously under the faded cretonne flowers, and she fumbled for the key. "This is the room."

*This is the room.* This is the room. Ohio, Kentucky, Iowa,

Washington, Colorado . . . *This is the room . . .* and the voices of landladies in a long fading chorus across the states. . . .

They stepped inside, and Elizabeth put the suitcases down. She had come to accept all things inside four walls as Martin accepted them. Only beauty surprised her any more.

Mrs. McNary paused at the door. "Your husband already paid the rent."

Statement of fact. Not another way of saying: You can't escape now. A long time ago Elizabeth had heard the triumphant drawing of a bolt in those six words. Now she only looked hopefully at the bed.

"Your husband fixed it all up for you," Mrs. McNary said. "It's a Murphy, and comes down."

Yes, Elizabeth thought. Struggling with it at night, it reminded her often of a vast, impersonal avalanche, a two-ton sheeted polar bear, upright, with crushing arms, descending suddenly or descending not at all.

It was not a bad room. Only ugly with that painful, conscious ugliness which only man, not nature, can achieve. The furniture was the color of dark apple butter, and squatted in the room. Somewhere long ago in an old natural history book by the Reverend O'Malley, she had seen the picture of a Surinam toad: they sat around her now with lace tidies on their heavy arms. Pale mustard-colored leaves wandered across the wallpaper . . . *like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing, Yellow and black and pale.* . . . The dim kitchen, where the light bulb dangled, was painted in a stricken green.

Desperately the eye tried to relate these things, to draw them together, but they fell apart. They could not mingle, but were doomed to sit, to stand, to lie behind each other, leaf against toad, toad against carpet, green against butter, hating each other and without release until the merciful darkness of night fell on them all.

The telephone in the hall upstairs rang, shattering the walls with warning, and Mrs. McNary limped away.

Martin sat in the arms of a great toad, and stretched his legs. "This is Mama-and-Martin's house," he said.

For a while her own life absorbed her, the maintenance of sanity in the midst of a mass of trivial detail, the daily tidelike creeping up of pain, the twelve hours of Martin. The rows of closed and numbered doors on the first, the second, and the third floor remained dark, numbered doors whose occupants came out and went in at audible hours, whose names were only names pasted on soiled slips of paper in the hall.

Life was boxes inside of boxes, life an onion, a hive within a hive. First the space of stars, the cold, the bitter stratosphere; and then the circle of oxygen and mountains surrounding a world of war and blood and insanity; and in that world Mrs. McNary's red brick bandbox full of rooms, and in the rooms herself and Martin, and in herself pain and another child—and in that child . . . ?

The weekdays passed with a curious, jerky flowing. She slept very little, aware at night of the cars returning, the gray webbed leaves on the wall, and felt an unreasonable fear if Martin coughed or cried in his sleep—a formless terror of his sickness and her own inadequacy born of being timid and too much alone. She had waking nightmares of falling sick or unconscious, and Martin left alone to cry and wander about, unable to open the locked doors or lift the windows. Often she longed to say to Mrs. McNary—to someone—anyone: "If you don't see me today, if you don't hear me, open the door! There'll be something wrong." Her heart seesawed between the seeing of domestic life as a drowning in a great cauldron of soft warm cabbage, and the seeing of it as a jungle of uncertainty full of the inquisitive and murderous shapes of vine and snake.

What was the core then, the seed of life, under the strange, inflated fruit of its living? Love, and that love capable of forever sweetening the monstrous fruit: love the core and seed and substance. Love of her husband which could diminish the mountain of trivia, dissolve the recurrent pain. . . .

Sometimes she would stop, with the paring knife poised above the potato—like a minor Abraham arrested by the Voice—to marvel over the incredible, the unchanging wonder of his loving kindness and his laughter that would dissolve the ultimate grave itself.

The fear passed, and the days patterned themselves into a ritual of living, a ritual outwardly clear and simple as the white face of the clock. Each morning after breakfast they went out to do the "messages," the daily shopping at the little store where Martin regularly and openly stole a coconut-encrusted cracker and a small red plum.

They walked under the beautiful arching elm trees in the perpetual, the incredible Colorado sunlight, past the white house where a black Pekingese sat on the doorstep with inane pink tongue lolling over its chin, and Martin always paused and crouched, patting him warily, their two small faces peering at each other an inch apart. "He has an *old* face," Martin said; and once they met the lady of the house coming down the steps, elegant and gray and kind.

"He's eleven years old," she told them. "He misses all the attention he used to get, now that the family is gone. Some day when you come by, he won't be here any more." It made the great house seem cold and empty, without even ghosts. A feeling of time and sadness came over Elizabeth, and then she began thinking avariciously and enviously of the house in terms of *Rooms*, and wondered why they didn't take in boarders. How nice for her and Martin to have, say, all the *southern* rooms, the rooms that looked out over the little garden with its great stone frog.

Mrs. McNary they seldom saw. Her room was fortunately on the second floor by the telephone, over which she carried on long conversations about the failing health of herself and all her friends. . . . "She looked just terrible—*terrible!* So old! I never seen her look worse before. . . . Any time now, I guess. Any time now. . . ." And once she called the department store and asked for Mr. Charles III, and they had a long loud conversation about a "little neckline," and it seemed she was having a fur piece remade. "But I just haven't any neck *left*," she giggled suddenly, and her voice stopped quavering and sounded very young.

Once she trapped Elizabeth in the hall when she was opening her little box, looking for what Martin called the "no mail," and told her about her past life and the days when she owned a

big store down in Texas. "I'll show you the pictures sometime," she said. Tears came to her eyes. "I don't know what's to become of me now. I'm getting old." She lowered her voice. "I had two strokes. Two strokes already." She put out her cigarette in the flower vase and looked very sly. "Once I lived in a boardinghouse with an old lady who thought it was wicked to smoke. You know what I used to do?—I used to crouch down and blow smoke through her keyhole!" The tears in her eyes glittered joyously. "That's what I did!—and she never knew!"

Of the other roomers she spoke very little. She was proud of the lady who had been with her seven years, but the rest seemed to come and go. "There's Mrs. Moran lives *here*," she whispered and pointed to the door behind her. "Sergeant Moran's been in the army nine years. They only been married two, though. The boy is hers."

Elizabeth remembered Mrs. Moran and Tom, fourteen, on the back doorstep, Mrs. Moran in the perpetual morning house-coat, young and haggard, with a voice like a fishmonger. "One of the bakers had to go to the Army, Mom, so they didn't have no cheesecake." "No cheesecake?" "They had apple squares." "Well, I don't *want* no apple squares! What's an apple square?"

And upstairs was Mrs. Mackey and her little girl. "She hasn't no husband any more. She works at night. A defense plant somewhere." They had a little fox terrier that they kicked and hugged, and it crawled on its belly along the floor. She and Mrs. Moran did a great deal of running up and downstairs, visiting in loud voices in each other's rooms, and through the thin, shaking walls Elizabeth could hear them: "I told her off! I told her what I thought. You wouldn't believe—" Sometimes Elizabeth wondered sadly why they didn't get tularemia of the tongue from skinning infected reputations, but there was something both kind and hard under their raddled faces.

"Now that girl on the third floor," Mrs. McNary was saying, "that's Mrs. Roberts—that's what she calls herself anyway, and her mother's Mrs. Cole." She looked about her furtively and wiped her hands on her dress. "She'll be going soon." Her mouth clamped shut; and for the first time Elizabeth heard a

baby crying—a far, plaintive sound like the sick mewing of a kitten.

In the afternoons they went to the park, a vast green place always sparkling with sprinklers and littered with little dogs. Black chows and tiny Pomeranians like puffs of yellow dust, and little Pekingese like hairy centipedes on the run. Across the wide greenness boys played football, and there would be a soldier walking slowly with a girl, and an old lady walking slowly with a book, hunting a quiet bench under the pine trees. It was less lonely out there in the sun and glittering spray, although they never saw anyone they knew; and Martin seemed to expand and sparkle like the sun and spray, without cause or thought.

At the far end of the park were long wading pools and a Grecian temple with a dial that pointed toward the blue-white mountains all along the sky. Martin took off his little clothes and walked along the pool edge, leaning against the stone urns stuffed with purple flowers. He looked like a plump white faun, his dark inquiring eyes peering out from under his always-fallen hair, the high white pillars rising up behind him under the blind blue of the sky. He was fascinated by the stone river-god who poured water from his mouth into the basin, and tried vainly to feed “the man” with fallen haw berries like small rosy apples, but they flowed down the stony beard and bobbed derisively in the pools below.

There was something so pagan and beautiful about it all that at any time girls bearing garlands might have come, and incense rise against the overpowering blueness. Instead came a host of ragged little boys who plunged in with their clothes still on and said, “Aw, —! It’s cold!”

After a while Martin climbed out of the pool and started to wander away, stark naked, down the white paths. “I’m going to see Daddy at the soldiers’ house,” he said over his shoulder. Comfortingly, reassuringly. “Mama is busy. Mama stay here.” He got as far as the haw trees and stopped to pick up apples. He had forgotten the soldiers’ house.

Elizabeth pondered on this wonderful sense of timelessness he had—of life flowing like the fountain from the stone god’s

mouth. It was a freedom beyond any freedom that could be won by prayer or by plowing tank. O brief and blessed circle of life beyond the tyranny of little ticking hands!

They came back late one afternoon and found Mary Roberts hanging up diapers on the line. She was thin and dark, with a kind of ravaged prettiness and enormous eyes. "How old is your little boy?" she asked suddenly. The savage nervousness of her voice sounded strange in the pleasant fading light.

"Almost three," Elizabeth said.

"You're lucky!" She hung up a little sock with an angry jerk. "Mine's just three months. I have to wash every day. It cries all the time! I couldn't stand it any more, I went back to work just so I wouldn't have to hear her cry!" She was trying to smile over the harsh running words. "It was a premature baby and only weighed four pounds. They had to put her in an incubator." The girl's eyes were black and angry. "If I'd have had my way, I'd have slammed the lid down and left it there! yes, I would!" Her hands trembled, hanging up the little clothes.

Elizabeth felt strange and shocked, as though she had seen some terrible and indecent operation on the spirit. She picked up Martin's warm, heavy body and hugged him in her arms, comforted by his solid reality, the feeling of his fat arms around her neck.

Thinking often of it afterward, she knew in her heart that this sense of outrage was only because of a truth spoken aloud. Once in every life the thought born of pain beyond endurance: *I'd have slammed the lid down and left it there*—a thought never voiced, dying without words, irrelevant because dead, but leaving its scar mark on the heart.

She became more conscious of the baby's crying, its thin, persistent wail three flights away.

Night after night they ate alone under the shaky lamp, Martin proudly setting the table with all the silverware he could find—a vast display of glittering cutlery surrounding their humble plates of hamburger and potatoes, and Martin using two forks and knives to shatter his little piece of bacon. Once they had cauliflower, and the smell seemed to fill the room like a warm and comforting presence to shut out the dark

and alien night, rather than a thing to be hushed and hidden according to all the fastidious cookery books. The strong and steamy smell was like a guest for supper.

Afterward they did the dishes, Martin standing up on a chair, swaddled in an apron, dreamily pouring soapsuds from one bottle to another, and Elizabeth listening for the telephone upstairs, waiting for Paul to call and somehow bring the long ritual of the day to its climax and its close. She thought of the thousands of other women waiting for that same shrill, nerve-shattering sound, and the thousands of interminable conversations, inane and comforting: *What did you do today, darling?* . . . *When are you coming home?* . . . *No, nothing special.* . . . *Yes, I'm fine.* . . . *Yes, he's fine. Are you tired?* . . . *No, I'm not tired. I got a letter from home.* . . . *Yes.* . . . *No. Not so good. Tomorrow?* . . . *I hope so. I hope so too. I love you. I love you.* . . . *Good-by now. Good-by.* . . . And somewhere the far away sound of a nickel clanging down its chute. Mountains of silver nickels.

Later she felt tired and lonely. The day had been surmounted—survived; the ironing still to be ironed, the long descent into sleep still to be made. At first she had been afraid that Martin would never sleep at night, the frail, ill-fitting door between them no barrier to sound. She would sneeze, and out of the darkness would come Martin's voice: "Mama choking?" calm, inquiring, without a trace of sleep in its fresh, solicitous tones. She would put the iron down softly, and hear Martin comment: "Mama working?" She lifted a postage stamp to lick, expecting with nervous terror to hear that clear, untiring voice: "Mama lapping?" But after a while he became accustomed to all things, gathered his bear, his broken plane, his wooden truck, under his stomach, and slept.

Elizabeth wondered sometimes what a good and expert mother was like. She loved Martin overwhelmingly, but was afraid of her own lethargy and lack of imagination. It was so easy simply to be a mother cow, mooing and—sometimes—switching in desperation. With one eye open for the obvious wolves, for the busses roaring across the daisy fields; otherwise, grazing.

It was wonderful how he accepted her. "Mama!" he would say, "Mama, come look!" His eyes glittering with the pure pleasure of disaster, his pink face shining: "Look! the toilet top is broken."

Elizabeth would wipe her hands and come to observe its drunken sagging. Hopelessly she hunted the missing screw and knelt down, peering under the high ball-footed tub. Martin pawed about among the fugitive dust kittens, and shook his head. "Maybe it's gone away to Grammaw's house," he said. "In a taxicab," he added hopefully. Then he shrugged his shoulders: "Grammaw will fix it," he announced.

Later, when anything came loose, was broken, lost, or out of order, he stopped saying, "Grammaw will fix it," with his old, reassuring confidence, and said merely: "Mama will fix it—some day." With resignation.

At night she took to reading the ladies' magazines. Avidly, hungrily, her eyes devouring, ravished by the poured smoothness of blue china plates, the amber glassware, the centerpieces of polished vegetables—amethystine eggplants surrounded by red peppers and gold squash—the ceramic salt-and-pepper shakers that must have cost four dollars a pair—white pottery cocks and glazed figurines of little bakers in white caps. And the incomparable, the devastating splendor of the food upon those plates! the bubbles of light in the quivering golden gelatin, the golden crackle of skin on the parsley-wreathed chicken, each golden wart upon the squash become a poem, and pearly onions in the fragrant peas. Here was an art so specialized that it transformed the grating rasp of neolithic tooth on bone into a hymn of beauty and digestion beyond all dreams and all comparisons.

But if her eyes and stomach were ravished by the glamour of the home-making pages, the stomach was also turned and faintly ravaged by the grimly saccharine literature that preceded them. She knew she did not have to read these stories, but she did. Here was a regimentation of the word so finely patterned and obeyed as to delight the maddest dictator's dream. An attitude toward life corrupt with sweetness, decomposing with cheerfulness, a mechanism so elaborately dressed

and painted and carrying both geraniums and orchids in its (always) feminine hands, that its breath of cash and honey might almost have been mistaken for life.

Here was Jinny, wife of Lieutenant Barry, having a baby and receiving a wire that Lieutenant Barry was missing in action, and then receiving a wire that Lieutenant Barry was found, and in the next page Nannette, wife of Lieutenant Jim, also having a baby, receives a wire that Jim is missing, and he is, but the baby looks just like Jim. And Donnie marries Lieutenant Dorrett, and Lydia waits for Lieutenant Rick, and Martie decides to stick it out on the West Coast and wait for Chris (*Lieutenant Chris*). Always the stuff of life, the pattern of life (no ladies' writer dared to be untimely), but so deodorized, so carefully culled from the Officers' Club, so scrubbed with Ivory and sprayed upon by cologne, so surrounded by chins lifted bravely in air, that the living reader felt ashamed of his mortality, abased with the knowledge of his doubt and cynicism and his chins tucked under chins—not proudly borne.

Their religion was the kewpie-doll Christ child of Della Robbia, beautiful and blue and plaster, not the adult, pain-maddened Christ crying aloud, "*How long, O Lord? How long?*"

This indulgence, this weakness for the bright and shining magazines, she could have overcome; but the nightly assault of the radio was beyond her power to defeat. Through the thin walls came the sound of Mrs. Moran's radio chattering, chattering, late into the night, and as she ironed the last lumpy little overall the loud, excited voice of the announcer filled all the air: "And now let us hope that Chee-chee," he was saying, "let us hope that Chee-chee will still believe that Lad is in love with her. And next time. . . ."

It reminded her of something in her childhood tasting faintly of peppermint, something about Grandmaw Kitkat and Tommy and Joey and Kitty Kat: "And now, children, if you are very good, *next time*—" *Next time* you will hear how Uncle Wiggly, caught in the trap of love, unable to renounce either Doris or his wife, defeated the old alligator with an empty molasses can.

And later as she lay in bed, stretching her tired and heavy legs, the Gospel Hour came through the wallpaper, plain and clear as though the Reverend Charley Riley, the Preaching Cowboy, sat beside her in the room, his ten-gallon hat upon her pillow.

“We have not suffered enough, my friends!” the flat and nasal voice, the fat and unctuous voice, the man visible in the voice, fat and immaculate, with dim, stupid eyes. “We are not willin’ to give up things. We dance and we smoke and we play golf. We must suffer more and smile more!” The dreary voice droned on: “Smiles, the one unrationed commodity. O my friends, smile! smile! Suffer and smile!” (Tears and the sagging cross. I, Charley the Preachin’ Cowboy, the onetime ranch-hand, I have hung from that cross—oh, so long ago.) “Smile. Smile. Suffer and smile!”

The Gospel Hour moved onward through the frail, stained walls. The Singin’ Quartet from Texas sang “Safe, Safe in the Arms of Jesus!” She drew the blankets over her ears, but the nasal sounds came through like sorrowful insects, mothworms gnawing through the blankets to her ears. In the darkness the pain in her side and chest seemed magnified, enormous. The terrible sensation of smothering under invisible weight. She moved her cold feet restlessly and turned over.

“I preach Christ and Him crucified,” another man had said. “But the function of man is not to suffer, but to overcome suffering. To endure, not to inflict, pain.” Words of some beauty and dignity, standing white and upright and hard like pillars in the darkness. She thought of the vast, barren barracks of the Army field, the acres of men in uniform swarming like ants between those barracks, the great invisible mechanism of Death, and somewhere a general speaking: “*We must hate with every fiber of our being. . . . Our object in life must be to kill. We need have no pangs of conscience. . . .*”

Through the walls began again the old and soiled perversion of religion. “Repent now, for the day of judgment is at hand! Repent for your cardplaying and your dancing, repent now and come home!” “*Home, home to Jesus!*” wailed the voices unhappy and unpleasant. Home . . . visions of cold and barren

halls with soiled, shadeless bulbs that hung from frayed and dirty cords; home without heat or light or sound, and Jesus saying, "I may live here, but I don't eat here."

And outside, the boarder of Apartment Four drove his car into the courtyard, and the room began to fill slowly with the familiar smells of exhaust fumes and red paint. She wondered tiredly if he was a chemist for some factory and took out half his salary in poison gas.

Other nights, lying awake and listening uneasily to Martin's patient and heavy breathing, she chose deliberately and defiantly, in the face of all the grim warnings of psychiatry and mental hygiene (but more fearful of the three-dimensional terrors than the hydras of insanity), to lose herself in old memories and in new fabricated dreams.

She spent a long time searching through time and remembered places for a pleasant and wholly suitable place in which to lie down and rest. A room not too small, nor yet too vast and impersonal, a room in which to be taken care of; not so near the house's heart that its sudden shouts and wails and clatter of potlids should rouse the weary sense of responsibility from its drugged repose, but not too far: so that she could still smell the warm and comforting odors of asparagus and potatoes boiling on the stove, hear the small thump of the ironing board, the sweet, strangely self-sufficient sound of Martin singing—Martin clean and well-fed and drugged with some magic soup to make him play by himself without match or tack or scissors—and the sound of the lawn mower . . . and the smell of green, drying grass. . . .

Hunting this place of peace she climbed the secret back stairs of the house where they had lived when she was nine years old, the white house with the oak trees on the lawn, and a blue rug in the bathroom. She went on down the hall into the big bedroom with its fireplace and the three iron beds recalling her childhood days—the warm and smoke-filled air of spring, the curled purple hyacinths, and herself—periodically sick with nervous indigestion—listening to the sound of roller skates, the "What-year?" of the redbirds in that soft, gray, treacherous air of spring. She saw herself sitting up in bed with a swimming

fog in her eyes, to peer out the window and see the other girls below, their black stockings rolled below their knees—infallible sign of early April—long, long before the months of white socks and roses, the shedding of one small winter scale.

In the middle room the smell of the croup kettle seemed to linger still, and the memory of terrible dreams and her mother coming through the darkness and speaking the Twenty-third Psalm: "*The Lord is my shepherd . . . he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul . . . I will fear no evil . . .*" and the hot sweat cooling under her nightgown, the wild thump of her heart subsiding warily, and eventually the summer dawn.

But she went on into the last bedroom where there was a big white double bed and white curtains at the windows that looked out over the worn lawn where the spring beauties came like a mist each year and the three purple crocuses grew along the walk. She could feel the weightless sensation of the little cotton balls under her fingers when she had tried to wrap each crocus from the raw March wind, and the white puffs blowing carelessly away, leaving the frail and naked cups exposed.

There were south and east windows here, and through the east windows she remembered the sound of gravel scrunching under the iceman's wagon, the scent, the unforgettable wet and sun-warmed spice of the high-bush roses, never seen or breathed since in life, and the beautiful satin and bloating buds of horse chestnuts in the spring.

Here where the hours slid away with the dwindling of the yellow sun-patches on the carpet, the sickness would slide away like a tide receding. The sounds—the small clink and thumps of the kitchen below, the warm and meat-filled smells of supper, and the six o'clock train which brought her father home . . . that six o'clock train with wonderful and punctual regularity, the men with stiff straw hats and evening papers folded underneath their arms, walking briskly, hungrily, dispersing hurriedly down the graying streets. . . . That train bringing her husband home, the knowledge of his coming home taken for granted like the setting sun—not late, not sometimes, not *perhaps tomorrow, darling . . .* the past and present be-

coming mingled in her mind, replacing each other as her heart hunted that old security, that sense of timelessness and childhood rhythm in which spring must follow winter, and the whistle of the evening train meant someone coming home.

And here in the southern room, lifting the heavy white spread, piling the white—the immaculate pillows behind her head; the dream ended. “It sure seems you might think of me sometimes!” Mrs. Moran said. The sergeant’s voice came through in a low and patient murmur, explaining, ignoring, dying away into sleep.

She lived, not uniquely, for the week-ends, but with such concentration that it almost frightened her sometimes. Like a miser aware with sudden sinkings that the gold-weighted sack develops a hole, or the goose-girl feeling the lone and egg-laden basket shift and slide from her clenching hand. You are allowed, she told herself patiently, fiercely, to live *each day*. God does not ration the sun. You don’t need a pass to see! But every hour she lived she counted only as a step nearer to Saturday and Sunday and his coming home.

Those Sunday mornings, lying awake in the still peacefulness, she watched the first gray and reflected light move around the room, the quiet toads become visible but gray and brooding, the brass chandelier with one bulb missing, and then slowly the leaves emerge upon the wall. She would turn and see her husband’s face peaceful with the young look of sleep; a momentary pause in the never-ending race to get enough rest before the next rising. “It seems like I meet myself getting up”: his only complaint after months of continuous tiredness.

She lay there quietly, knowing there was no use to get up and have everything in readiness—the fragrant smell of coffee, the spotless white cups, herself face-polished, combed, and aproned. The enormous Murphy filled all the room except for space to sidle like a paper doll between it and the wall; the kitchen was filled with dirty dishes, and the clink of the first washed cup would bring Martin like a fat bullet from his bed.

Sunday morning the other roomers slept and there was a great peace. Somewhere a spider spun his web over Time’s

scythe, the old man slept with torn wings folded, head drooping toward his knees.

And then suddenly Martin would give his long waking sigh and turn over, and the red truck would fall out on the floor with a sharp, metallic clang. Elizabeth could see the spider fleeing from his web, the old man reach for the scythe in sleep, with pale, rheumatic hands. And then came the soft, pajama-muffled thud of Martin's feet, the click of the doorknob.

"I'm out of bed!" a sort of pleased and wondering publication, as though each grimy dawn were Christmas morning. He climbed up over the headboard expectantly, never quite sure if Paul would be there or not, but accepting his presence without undue surprise. "Daddy's in the bed," he announced, and Paul opened one kind and weary eye, measuring the wing-spread, the plunge, the probable force of landing.

Paul always woke at home—to her infinite surprise and amazement—in a sort of warm aura of pleasure, unwebbed by nightmares or the shuddering realization of life's return. As though his soul had been up for hours already, washing its face in mountain water and retaining its immortal afterglow.

They would breakfast a long time, conscious of the shareless infinity of twelve hours before the bus and the pass and the gate. The sunlight coming through the somewhat soiled windows, making warm squares along the carpet where Martin, physician, sat on the stomach of his cinnamon bear, gnawing toast and probing the furry ears. "A sort of witch-doctor treatment," Paul said. He felt a deep sympathy for the bear's stomach, a sympathy born of experience.

The syrup melted on the muffins. Elizabeth felt the brown, the comforting warmth of coffee inside her, and her little insect-bitten, detail-ridden soul seemed to expand into a great warm sun. Paul sat there merely sighing with happiness over his dripping muffin. "We had pancakes one morning out at camp," he said. "They got dished out looking wonderful, all drowned in syrup. Only one of the guys had made a mistake, and the 'syrup' was pools of hot bacon grease."

Elizabeth pondered mildly on the doubleness of his life, of most men's lives. She knew he was not exactly the same gentle

and kindly soul away from her. It pleased her in a way to think of his adapting himself so thoroughly, so easily to a life totally without the amenities or the artificial graces. . . . "And I was trying to sleep, and they kept roaring at each other, and I sat up in bed and bellowed: 'You get your goddam — boots off my bed or I'll pull your goddam boots right off your — feet and stuff 'em down your throats!' And they did. . . . And he said: 'So your wife wasn't expecting you?' and then he winked and said, 'It was goddam nice of you to call her up and let the other fellow have a chancet to get away—' and then he apologized. I would have killed him," Paul said quietly, and she saw with a feeling of strangeness that he meant it.

Perhaps the adapting came after all in his life with *her*. There was a thought. Or more likely, it wasn't adapting at all, just living, himself in two worlds, at home in either—at home in others.

It was his third world he liked most to talk of: the one never lived in, his secret life beyond the barracks and the dust and the marching, the life after the guns and the bombs and the inevitable night; his land beyond the desert in the Circle Cliffs, surrounded by forests of fir and piñon trees, land where they had seen the gray deer running in the spring. Word by word he had built the dam and the house and was already hard at work on a swimming pool for the children and a proper location for the beehives. The barren sage-land was sown with alfalfa, the two corrals were full of lambs. "Now *here*," he would say with his pencil, an exalted and dream-racked grin spread over his face, "here is the garden, with a stone wall around it."

*Here is the garden.* He had built it with uncanny precision after some childhood dream of her own: a walled garden outside the bedroom and a little door, so that one made no long formal excursion to the garden, but stepped outside the bedroom and was there. She saw the flowers in all their startling unreality of color, the mountain air magnifying and glittering them into something more jewel- than flower-like; the white honey-smell of mignonette, the snow clouds of the phlox against the wall, the purple ageratum remembered from her childhood, and the roses. The clarity and the immensity of the

West never seemed quite real to Elizabeth, born in a soft, damp climate, mountainless, and her version of the dream narrowed inward to the circle of the house and garden, the lizard on the southern wall, the children at the table, and the lamb stew on the stove.

She was aware of the long interim of the beginning, the wood and nails that would not come, the inevitable sickness, the broken pipe line, the loneliness, the unseasonable snow, but passed them over calmly, resignedly, in her heart. They would work and probably suffer, but this time for life, not for death. And Paul would come home. She sat on the doorstep in the red evening sun and saw him coming a long way off, a small blue figure in the fields, waving his arm under the giant boulders that cropped up like stone mammoths rising from the earth, and coming nearer and nearer until she could see his smile and the beloved lines around his eyes, and then so near he was taller and wider than the sun.

Sometimes they took Martin and a picnic to the zoo. It wasn't much of a zoo, mostly acres of park with a few sick lions and dirty birds in outdoor cages; but there were gardens of brilliant blazing flowers, hot red zinnias and molten marigolds; and black bears splashed in and out of the filthy peanut-floating pools. Martin ate a mammoth ice-cream cone and listened to the roaring of the lions. The blind white polar bear dozed on a rock.

The park was full of soldiers and soldiers' wives and girls looking for soldiers and soldiers looking for girls, and Mexican families with clusters of brown and ragged children with black eyes like polished olives. The duck ponds were full of small gold leaves—locust and willow—drifting and gathering at the edges, and the black swans sailed in a carved and ominous majesty. Over everything the enormous, cloudless blue of the Colorado sky.

They ate lunch under the giant cottonwoods, near a Swedish family who had huge baskets of food—baskets whose contents Elizabeth tried cunningly to discern without appearing to pry; and Paul went off to buy some pop. Martin surrounded the

lunch box on every side and took a ham sandwich and a fried chicken wing. "It's *nice* out here," he sighed.

When Paul came back, he was smiling vaguely. "I saw a blonde sitting on a bench," he said. He put down the poisonous-orange pop. "And she said, 'Soldier, you look lonesome.'"

"And what did *you* say? Eat the crust part, Martin, honey."

"And I said, 'Oh, but I'm *not*!' and went on walking." Paul looked smug and faintly pleased with himself, like a little boy. "She had *two* soldiers when I came back."

Elizabeth laughed, but she felt somehow sorry for this unknown girl, seeing herself very lonely, with greenish blond hair, sitting on a park bench, and Paul passing cheerfully, indifferently—*Oh, but I'm not!*—cutting her throat with kind, Olympian hands. And there she would sit, giggling with two soldiers, wondering where they could hire a room, and fingering the change inside their pockets.

They went afterward to see the buffalo and the sacred-temple oxen in their little pastures, the buffalo so monstrous and majestic they brought tears to her eyes. What whim of God's, to fashion these tremendous and fantastic heads! The sacred cows walked gently on the barren earth, gray and white, bearing steep temples on their shoulders. Blue peacocks stalked in and out among the pale cows, and the leaves were all dry and shriveled.

Paul told her about the wild herds of cattle in the Utah deserts that mated with buffalo and produced strange, enormous beasts called cattelo, and how one buffalo herd had been seen in the canyons, led by a giant cattelo, and they followed him blindly, willingly, like sheep after a bellwether, probably both proud and awed by their monstrous offspring.

It grew late and she saw Paul look at his watch with that familiar and pregnant gesture which sent her heart sliding grayly downward, hearing the invisible scythe sound in the grass. "It's time to go home," she said very quickly, pretending not to have seen. "Martin is getting tired." Gray cobwebs seemed to rise and cover the afternoon sun.

And they came back through the early-falling leaves to the

familiar smells of mice and onions and the sergeant's frying meat.

September passed into October. The arch of elms became a tunnel of gold. There was a frostiness in the morning sun, and the dry leaves on the sidewalks turned white and powdery. The elm leaves were mottled pale green and tan, like little maps. Each death a different pattern. In the park the ground was gold with small locust leaves.

Old Mrs. Cole ventured down three flights of stairs, easing her stiff, rheumatic leg, and took the baby to the park. They found her holding it in the sun under the lilac bushes where Martin made butterflies out of the leaves, tearing them in half and twirling the ragged greenness. They sat on the bench and talked about the ancient and timeless things, marriage and childbirth.

"That man!" Mrs. Cole said. "I tried to stop her, but she went right ahead. They don't live together now. They didn't live together only long enough to get the baby started. He's common, Mrs. Welles, and drinks. My God! the places we've had to move out of on account of his coming back! Mary, she never gained an ounce the whole time she was pregnant! And one night he come up making a row and threatening her. He carries a gun, Mrs. Welles. And that night the pains come on her, two months ahead of time." She rocked the baby in her arms. The white, still face in the blanket seemed very old. "It was terrible, I tell you!"

Martin climbed up on the bench. He took the baby's hand and sat there quietly holding it.

"I had three children myself," Mrs. Cole said. "One time when we was living in Gold Fork—that was a little old mining town down south of here—I had an Austrian midwife. She was strong as a horse. You know those foreigners, strong as a horse, and it was one of her church holidays the baby came, and she didn't show up, and there I was, lying on the bed and the baby come, and all I could do for hours was just lean over and pat it sometimes where it lay!"

She shook her tired old head and smiled at the baby's passive

face. "The things a person lives through, Mrs. Welles! You'd be surprised!"

September into October, and Martin caught a cold in his chest. The sound of his little coughing in the night filled Elizabeth with a primitive terror and anxiety. The small room seemed to draw in on them both like a shrinking prison. The world outside grew alien and enormous beyond belief. Mountain rains poured down the dim windows, shattering the autumn roses and stripping the elms' last gold.

Martin felt the gravity, the importance of having the doctor's visits. His spirits recovered long before his chest, and he paced up and down the bed, ankle-deep in trains and beads and torn, fluttering objects—pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. This last had been a splendid occupation, lasting almost an hour. Then Elizabeth, peacefully washing the gritty tub, had heard him talking to her. Pleasantly. Conversationally. "Mama, I am cutting out Martin."

"Yes, darling, you do that," she had said absently, cheerfully. And then the sinister import of his words had struck through her wandering thoughts, and she had rushed in to find him snipping slowly around his pajama seams.

In that last month Mrs. McNary seemed to get strange and even less sure of herself. Tears came to her eyes, and she got out old clippings and photographs and wept over them. She came down and read yellowed sheets of sad, sentimental poetry to Elizabeth, sobbing over the last lines and wiping her rouged old cheeks. "I don't know what's the matter with me," she'd say. "It's just the way I feel, I guess, I just don't know. I'm getting old, like the poem says. I'm getting old. . . ."

"You mustn't bother yourself like this," Elizabeth said. "You mustn't get out all these old memories and things. It just makes you unhappy." She felt childish and hypocritical, giving advice to the old lady—gone far beyond all help now, just marking time, desolate and tearstained in her dirty flowered housecoat.

But Mrs. McNary wiped her eyes and seemed comforted. "I mustn't, must I?" she said. "But . . . what's to become of me?"

*What's to become of me?* . . . and of me, and all the thou-

sands of others? As Paul's time of training drew nearer to its close, the feeling of unrest and uncertainty began to grow on her. Any day the change might come: his name on the shipping list. Destination unknown. Season of migration. Her heart jumped and quivered every time the telephone clanged upstairs.

Along toward the end of the month Mrs. McNary's daughter came and took her away. Elizabeth remembered the day as being warm and windy, and the sound of Mrs. McNary's last sobbing coming down the stairs unreal and ghostly like the wind in dormer windows which had seemed like banshees to her as a child.

The house went into the hands of a real estate company, and pink-faced agents tried vainly to impress its beauty and advantages on grim prospective landladies who stepped fastidiously over Martin's toys and asked the number of toilets and the rent.

One wet, foggy night Elizabeth opened the door into the hall and stopped with an unreasonable sense of fear and warning.

A man stood in the dim hall-light at the foot of the stairs, dirt-streaked and bareheaded, peering about uncertainly. That baffled, belligerent uncertainty of the very drunk. Blond faded hair hung over his eyes.

He hesitated like an animal sniffing the wind, and then opened the door and plunged out into the fog.

It haunted her all night, both with fear and the sense of waste, of living degradation and loss. She heard feet moving in the dead leaves under her window, and later there were voices and feet stumbling heavily on the stairs; and then the house was ominously silent.

For three days she expected Paul home each night, and each night she sat down with resignation to eat his carefully prepared and long-planned suppers; and then the third night she bundled the too-many chops and muffins in a napkin and climbed upstairs to Mrs. Cole's room. She felt shy about offering them food, but the loneliness and waste were worse.

She knocked gently, and was startled by the sharp, suspicious voice that seemed to leap at her through the door.

"It's Mrs. Welles," she said, "and Martin."

Mrs. Cole opened the door with the baby in her arms, and smiled. "After *that* night," she said, "we just don't know—"

Mary was sitting on the withered little sofa, looking tired and shriveled in an old maternity dress that hung from her tiny shoulders like a curtain. The room seemed smaller, the ceiling lower, the warm air heavy with soaking diapers.

"We're sure glad to see you," Mrs. Cole said. "Lookit poor Mary there!"

Mary smiled, but her ears were bandaged and her feet tied up in cloths. "It's ulcers," she said. "All my toes got infected and broke out, and my ears—Mom had to punch them both!" The pain made her face white and shriveled. Her black eyes seemed a little wild.

"It never rains but it pours," Mrs. Cole said cheerfully. "If it isn't one thing, it's another—and mostly both."

"Did *he* bother you that night?" Mary burst out suddenly. "It was awful. He come up, and I hid under the bed, and for three hours he was here threatening Mama. 'Where's she at?' he kept shouting. 'What feller's she gone out with?' And all the time I was laying there under the bed."

"I wanted to call the police," Mrs. Cole said. She rocked the baby fiercely in her arms. "But I couldn't get out the door. He might have thrown me down the stairs like he done before! And then that little dog on the second floor barked, and he says, 'I bet that's the police,' and ran and hid in the closet—"

"And then Mom sneaked out and went down and phoned them. Oh, he's vile, Mrs. Welles, he's vile!"

Martin sat calm and uncomprehending. Once he patted the baby gently through the blanket.

"And when they come, he heard the car and he thought it was me coming back with some fellow, and he run downstairs and outside and run right into their arms. Oh, my God, I wish they'd lock him up good for life!"

She took the baby from her mother and felt its clothes. "It's all wet, like I thought." She sighed and unwound the blanket. "You're lucky," she said to Elizabeth. "You got a good husband. You sure are lucky!"

"I know," Elizabeth said. "I know I am."

How wholly, how completely empty are little words! God handed you the whole world—or all of it that mattered, anyway—and you said, *I know. I know I am.*

It came as she had expected it to come—when she stopped expecting it.

"You go back home," Paul said. "I'll let you know where they send me." He seemed to pause a long time, invisible at the other end of the phone. Then his old, inexhaustible cheerfulness came back. "Maybe you can come there too."

When she hung up the receiver, the hall seemed enormous and cold, the one dim light more dim and murky than ever. As in a dream of childhood, the walls going on and on forever in a tunnel, herself receding, shrinking to a pin-point size. The whole house hushed and alien.

Through the dimness she saw Martin lying on his stomach, trying to peer under the door of Apartment One, and she gathered him up in a dream, brushing the dust curls off his suit.

The day they left, a sudden snowstorm poured down out of the mountains and clung like white wet fur on every branch and dead rosebush. The telephone wires were long ropes of Christmas tinsel, fantastically pure and beautiful above the groaning busses. The cold white world brought back with nearness the Christmas and Thanksgiving days long ago—white linen tablecloths and celery and the scent of cedar through a keyhole in the dawn. She remembered snow in Ohio falling day after day in the winter before Martin could walk—soft suburban snow, and the pure and deathly hush of snow in the parkways. Snow in Iowa day after day the winter he was sick, and the gold dome of the university shining like a sun behind the gray-white snow. Snow in Missouri, and birds coming to the great dark sunflower seeds . . . snow in Washington, and the great white buildings like cold tombs. . . .

In those last days after Paul had left, she felt strangely detached and unreal, as though in a foreign city and unable to speak an alien tongue. She went through the ritual of departure as in a mechanical dream. She called the few friends there had been time to make, and said good-by. She called the real estate

company and the gas company and the light company. She made reservations on the train, and said good-by to the grocer and the laundryman, and packed herself slowly into a narrowing circle of the necessary things to be worn, to be eaten, to be slept in in the final hours.

The last day the expressman came and took away the bundles of blankets, the string-tied boxes, the bags, the packages, the bundles, the boxes . . . man and his possessions, the cave-woman carrying a sea shell and a stone. It came to Elizabeth that expressmen hated civilization and all the trappings of its nature. They hated all these blind and unseen things they hoisted day after day from spring to snow, and hated especially both shipper and shippee.

Martin waited with infinite patience in the hall, his nose against the pane, his little breath making steam splotches on the glass.

Mrs. Cole came hitching down the stair to say good-by. "I sure wish you good luck," she said. "I sure hate to see you go." She folded her arms against the drafty hall.

Elizabeth asked about Mary, and she shook her head, patiently, cheerfully, with all the resignation of the helpless and yet undefeated. "Mary—she went to work, but she was late. I called and called, but I couldn't get no taxis at that hour. Her toes was so swelled up she had to wear bedroom slippers. She was standing out in that snow a full three-quarter hour, waiting for the bus. But I lanced her ears. She'll be all right pretty soon."

She put her long bony hand in her pocket and handed Martin a dime. "You buy him some popcorn, Mrs. Welles. He might get hungry on the train. They always do."

Down the hall came the baby's hopeless little mewing, and Mrs. Cole started up the stairs again. "You send us a postcard when the baby's born," she said.

They waved at each other, and Elizabeth saw the kind, ravaged face under the dingy red hair turn, and her tall, twisted body move patiently up the second stairs.

Elizabeth opened the little mailbox and took out her name. Mrs. Paul Welles. She looked at it with tenderness and then

crumpled it in her pocket. Who comes next? And after them? and after them?—the little slips sliding in and out until the last apartment house had crumbled fine and thin like its strawy flowers, or blown its strange disharmony into ashes under some blind bomb. She felt a still patience. What after this? What next?

“Mama! The taxi!” Martin shouted.

She took his warm, fat, mittenend hand.

As they drove away through the skidding-icy streets she kept seeing Mary Roberts—Mary Cole—standing on the street corner in her old bedroom slippers, the snow falling around her banded ears. . . . And then in the little French picture book the shivering birds, the drifting fox . . . *tombé, tombé*—the snow falls and falls. . . .

The gray arch of the station loomed ahead.

# *Home Is a Place*

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*by BESSIE BREUER*

IT FINALLY occurred to me that I did have a choice. That I might go to a city and make a life where nothing would remind me, but still I sat as I had for weeks waiting, and I tried to make myself over into an old woman. I put on the pink bed socks, and over the silk nightdress with long sleeves I tried on the pink quilted bed jacket. The electric heating pad was already at top heat between the sheets, my soft silky finest percale sheets, and under the bottom sheet I always spread a woolen blanket now instead of a cotton pad, and with the pair of English heavy blankets added above me, it made quite a heavy load to roll back and then pull over me. And if I lay in a certain way, though my bones ached, I slept very long and through the night. But if I forgot, and moved in my sleep, the rest of the bed and myself were like ice until I pushed back to the electric pad and the straight long line of warmth under the heavy weight of covers pressing me down. Pressing me down, down, down heavy, so that I didn't need Harry ever any more the way I did at first because I was so cold always and thought, it's only that I shall never, never be able to sleep again.

That was the only way I truly missed Harry. If they only knew whose voices every day at one time or another came through the telephone over-soft, over-sweet, over-solemn. You're sure you really want to come to the motor corps drill today? . . . you needn't, you know we'll understand. Or Katherine will take your watch on the tower. Darling Georgie, and darling brave Georgie, I really feel most uncomfortable at the thought of you alone in that big house. But I know you wouldn't want to come to dinner. And by the way, Georgie

darling, have you heard anything? How long ago was it that they had stopped saying, I guess you'll be going down to Portland or to Kittery or Portsmouth or Boston, or wherever the cutter might be stopping in for refitting or repair.

It is only that in this little New Hampshire place I am the first. I am the object, the monument against which the first mourning wreaths are to be slung. Or the suttee for their sorrows to come.

Of the young boys who went out of the homes, only one has indubitably fallen. Fallen . . . there is the body, the brow, the twisted leg in certitude against the ground. There is even a place to be visited afterward and so suitably arranged with convenient busses to the spectral geometry of a military graveyard. A man is alive, a man, a ship vanishes and even the words are of no substance, must be presumed to be . . . must be presumed to be . . .

It was then exactly nine weeks and six days ago that the stillness had settled in on the house.

I was feeling so cozy, the logs had burned down to a glow and a simmer and I had the third cup of my own sweet blend of lapsang and jasmine inside me and reading those pages in Madame Dostoevski's diary where the young bride writes her mother that her husband has pawned away her last treasure, her lace shawl, and pitying the poor thing out of my own cozy life, when, for no reason, I lifted my head and looked over my shoulder toward the window. As if it must come through the windowpanes, the stillness was sifting in like the cool gusts into which you sail bare and brown on a summer day and shiver with cold.

But it was nothing from outside. A timid nuthatch slipping up the grapevine toward the feeding box outside the window squawked with fright as she met my living eye staring to see. I shaded my eyes from the birds. Then after a while I walked into his study, and I sat down in this his chair, and I endured the silence. And I looked at all his things. What drew my eyes to this book? All I thought was that I had a great deal of time to read, and that in my jumbled reading I had never read Vergil, though I had often said the word Vergil and the word

*Aeneid* because they were so beautiful to say, and so I walked over to the shelves and took down this green book with the golden letters, and it opened to a page and I read it again before my mind sharpened to what my eyes were seeing. "What God Oh Palinure did snatch thee so away from us, thy friends, and drown thee dead amidst the watery way?"

"How absurd!" I said aloud. "A silly coincidence," and I threw the book to the floor. But after a while I picked it up and smoothed it because I was sorry, and I carefully put it back in its place. And after that had happened and the terrible stillness remained I stayed mostly in his study and I took down the book often, but the words were always the same.

It was not even a telegram, it was a letter when the farmer finally brought it up from the mailbox at the road. On top of all lay the long grayish-white envelope and the "Navy Department" so thinly printed as if they were stingy with their ink, and the farmer saying, "News at last," and he stood and waited. But quickly I covered it with the envelope from the bank; kept from touching it by the under-thickness of other letters, and I smiled and thanked him and did not move until he went away.

What a babbler. A grown-up man with thick legs bowed from carrying his barrel-belly and his red flushed face. Up and down the road he is stopping the farm truck to tell. The telephone began to ring. I started toward it, stopped. They would want an answer or come in their bodies to see. And I was just nothing. I felt nothing. I was nothing. I had no substance. I seemed to draw no breath.

I heard a car come up the driveway. Someone. . . . Oh, no words, never words. Quickly I ran up to the attic. Stood rigid behind the door and heard Agatha calling, then up and through all the bedrooms calling, sharp, anxious. Once the floor creaked when I shifted but she did not hear.

Many more would be coming. It was just that I couldn't breathe. I must get away where I could breathe. After Agatha's car had gone and I was safe I came down and quickly packed a bag, threw off my slacks and on with a dress and coat and ran to my car and drove away. At Portsmouth I put up my car and caught the train for Boston.

I was safe. I sat huddled in my fur coat, warm, cozy, and safe. And I yawned as if with a great tiredness, and thought how pleasant it would be in the hotel with its warm lights and many mysterious people and good food and music and the soft warm beds. And no one would know. Or ask.

But as I came in, carrying my own little bag, the assistant manager saw me, and hurried toward me, taking it out of my hand.

The white carnation bristled out of his black suit, and he smiled and asked, "You expect the Commander in tonight?"

I lowered my head over the desk card, and took up the pen. Slowly, carefully, I made the letters. Mrs. Georgiana Cushing. Had I ever been a person? Had I ever been Georgiana Cushing? I had never been Georgiana Cushing. I had always been Georgiana, *wife* of —.

The door finally closed behind the page. A dressing gown, a silk bit of nightdress, no slippers, no toilet things, no tooth-brush, just all that mail in the opened bag. No matter. This was my new home. No one could reach me ever, unless by my wish. I went into the bathroom and turned on the taps, and I undressed for my brand new life.

It was only a bathtub, a bathtub that was far too large for me, but as the water rushed and bubbled and seethed around me, in sudden terror I jumped out and ran into the bedroom, and closed the heavy mahogany door tight behind me. It was silly and stupid, and not like me but I did not go back into the bath.

Redressed and cleaned after a fashion and groomed after a fashion I sat down in a wide mahogany chair with lacy arm rests, and felt much better.

These were the things that lasted, the heavy stuffed chairs, the wide bureaus and bronze-cradled mirrors, the sconces and mahogany bedsteads and the thick carpet underfoot. They have seen us and we are the ones that pass. Perhaps it was in this very room, throwing that very same white bath towel from about his strong, freshened body that he had said, "It's like being born again. Coming back to this." Coming back, coming

back. He need never have gone. "Why you?" I had asked. "Just because you love to sail?"

"I don't take life as a gift from boys of seventeen and eighteen."

Yes, that was easy for him to say. For others, sympathy. But for himself, for me? People can't be clever who are so noble. Anyone that is clever knows that life is best. I see sharp little people who look away when they see a lad in uniform. They know. . . .

Ah, well, here was a room and it was a splendid room. And starting with it I was certain I could always begin. I knew so many people I could bring crowding in here. The women who begged me to stop with them whenever I came to town. All the dinner parties to which I had never gone because Harry and I never had the time. Then I realized that of all these there would be no one, once I faced them alone, a bitter useless creature. I began to tick off the names of all. . . . Only Griff. Griff surely remained. I had never telephoned him before. Always it was Harry. His name was in the directory, and his slow voice answered out of the deep quiet of the telephone.

Not dinner tonight, not even a cocktail tonight. Or anything tomorrow. But Sunday, Sunday far away at placid noon. And his voice careful, grave, then asked the single question. "You're sure you're all right?"

What would I do until then? What did he think I would do until then? But he doesn't care, don't you understand? It wasn't with you that he went through Andover and Harvard. He is taking life quietly, easily, teaching ensigns or what's left the facts of English history. . . .

I went into the bathroom and washed my hands and washed them over again. I had no brush and I dabbed with my hands at the specks on the shoulders of my blue wool dress, before I went down in the elevator.

But how do you begin? I stopped at the wide entrance to the bar. Alone and waiting, of course. But alone and not waiting for anyone. I turned and walked back and sat down, like many women, and watched the many people passing.

Now my own eyes had to make a meaning out of everything

I saw . . . not to slip over people, really to rest them only on the one beside you. Now there is no one to whom to pass on the half-seeing, the half-feeling. Now without help or palliation I must accept the responsibility of my sharp eye unsubdued, unshared, the responsibility passed over in a single witty comment.

Here was a boy approaching the hotel manager. Everything snubbed up on him, his tan hair, his nose, his cheekbones, and when he walked his legs whisking loosely among the folds of his raincoat seemed to have no connection with his upbearing chest. He came up to the hotel manager and they stood near me.

I stood, looked at the boy, a slender frail boy with a long neck and clear brown eyes and that pink complexion that suggests tuberculosis. How absurd really to keep looking at a boy's dirty cold red hands, at the long tender bone that shot out of his cravette sleeve. . . .

Why was Harry always picking up boys and telling me about them? "I had breakfast coming up from Washington with a bunch of British sub boys—one shy lad only seventeen had been in His Majesty's Navy since he was thirteen. . . . How do you think that made me feel, Georgie?"

Or sitting late in the night while watching the dancing. In this very hotel. "Half a million ghosts, Georgie. Five hundred thousand boys we're convoying across that the Army has already written off as dead. They are wraiths, Georgie, every mother's son of them. We're lucky not to have that to bear." Lucky. . . .

A little frail woman with gray hair sitting near me arose. I watched the way she smoothed down her long black dress and placed a veined hand on the heavy carnelians at her neck, and in passing brushed the pendant gold watch on her breast. Then leaning on her cane, she walked slowly toward the dining room. Everyone bowed and smiled, and the waiters made way for her. That was the way. And now it was my turn to enter alone the lovely crimson and white dining room, with flowers and mirrors. But now for me a tiny table to the rear.

It was enough to be here and everything remembered. The

long close sitting. The long, long silence. The wine and the still untouched dancing, the dancing scarcely moving, and the silence. And I looked at the men who sat alone, at the stripes and the golden dolphins playing on their breasts, at the loneliness and the passion striking off their lean sharp strength.

They're different after they've been at sea. It should be plain then to any eye, the stillness, the coldness of men from the sea. The way their elbows groove closer to their sides, the spareness of each body motion, of each glance out of their cool eyes, of the single words that come so meagerly out of the steady straight line of lip. How narrowly they watched the happy careless people dancing—the girls and women, everything as if it were strange, and in a way terrible to see. And wonderful. But no one else must know. But I knew, watching them as narrowly. I could see way in clear to their hungry bones, ah, yes.

The dancer sprang onto the stage, lean and taut, and we watched him as he knitted in and raveled out, as he breasted up and spun and bounced, the rest of the vast room dark and the light blazing on him and girl and boy faces like a curve of lighted candles at the tables that lined his platform.

He spoke to us, who sat at tables far out in the dark, and many people laughed, but the connection was broken. It had no meaning; it was not music and it was not dancing, it was a meaningless movement of a broken toy, a wooden toy on strings jerking about, and I could have sat on watching forever, because it had no meaning and it didn't matter, because nothing came back to my ear or my blood, only my eye looking on. But finally I had to go. Everyone was leaving. When it came time to pay the check I opened my bag and there was that long envelope. I tore it open and read it, that is, I scarcely glanced at it, it made no difference.

And now and finally there was the room that I must enter again.

All the stupidities at once. Both of the beds were turned down for the night. All night long I lay, my back to the other. I was cold, and I lay listening to the loud hoarse voices of men mingled with the high senseless shrieking voices of women through the transom above. I could, I should have moved to

shut it out, but I lay rigid, listening to the waste and the riot. Two more bottles of Scotch, they called down the hallway, and again more Scotch, and their screaming and laughing rose and fell as if the opening and the closing of their door were a bellows to their happy sounds. Now and again through the long night there was a loud knocking at their door and a bull-voice saying, "Break the party up," or again the voice coming, "Quiet, please, quiet."

Not for me the quiet, it was the stupidity and the desecration that I minded. (They are laughing too long and too hard, Harry, and they are keeping me from listening to you. Way down deep inside my head will be bent over forever listening to you inside unshrouded and forever alive though dead in me. I will always be listening and my eyes will always have that morbid sweet and absent stare in them like the widows you avoided like the plague. Whom everyone avoids. And now in my turn you are settled firmly down through every vein of me. And the stillness and the quiet and the cold move out from you within me, an invisible wind cooling the air around me and separating me from the warm and the living forever.)

I had all the time in the world. I could sleep forever, and I waited for dawn, and at last the bells began to sound, five times, and at last six, and the darkness lifting and finally a voice outside making crisp single sounds of command.

Far down below me in a courtyard, the long walls of the buildings down-slanting, a horizontal bar of darkness stretched rigid, soldiers at attention. I hung over the sooted window sill straining to catch the outlines of the words, but they were always grave, peremptory without form, floating over the dark bars of men. A smooth white dog all wrong white angles splayed out below me and ribboned in and out among the soldiers' legs but no one would tell him or help him find what so eagerly he snuffed for, and then they turned and with a rush of sound like a breaker hissing on a gale-tossed shore, with a crackle as of wind tearing through sails they marched, and my mind took up the beat, quick, quick, hurry, hurry, quick, quick, hurry, hurry, and what the destination, Landsmen? What are you doing here in this city by the sea?

I could have slept till noon. There was no one here to call me on the telephone. But if I ate downstairs I could watch the people passing and the time would somehow pass more swiftly until Griffis came.

I saw everything now that I had never needed to see before. How old, how very old the elevator man, his red-rimmed eyes, his grayed and delicate skin, where I had only seen the livery and the hand so carefully gloved in white. It is hard, he said, as he took me down in the elevator. The times are hard, and I nodded wondering that even for one so old, there is always something left, a hope and a future, a complaint to be made and a happiness to be looked to.

And after breakfast I sat in a long alley walled with mirrors and looked through revolving glass doors to the street outside. I might go for a walk, but still I sat on and one by one the seats filled and they were all women, and most of them were old. And their voices when they spoke were loud, as if there was nothing any longer that belonged to themselves, as if we were all together, and waiting for what. Their eyes would glance down the hallway, nodding at each other, nodding to me, while they spoke, and to this I must listen, their eyes holding on.

"I should have married Grenville before he left . . . how cold it must be out at sea . . . they don't heat the trains . . . they don't have porters . . . they marched him two miles up a mountain with his heart and now he's out at sea." The sea, the sea, hissing in every word they said . . . living by the sea, sailing boats by the sea, children by the sea. How cold, how cold it must be out at sea, and all in their warm coats shivering.

"The poor sailors," said one, and we looked out and saw a platoon of sailors marching across the square and the women sighed as if it were the bitter sea itself. Then I knew. These are the women who watch, as women have always watched by the sea. And nothing will ever return.

Now I too could sit and watch, and while I waited listen to Miss Chatham lecture on current events. Every Friday, in this very hotel, said the gray-haired watcher who was asking me to come. But I shook my head. Ah, no, she was making a mistake, poor old darling. I had a home. I didn't need to sit

and watch the unseen sea for what never never would return. Had he not said, home is a place? The time before last when he had come all the way home? It's strange, he had said, the psychic effect of a return to your birthplace. The very soil, the clear light, the river winding through the valley. Such complete lethargy and relaxation struck me that I thought I was sick, he said. I feel fine and rested now, darling, and I thank you, darling. I'm grateful to you for keeping it so beautifully, is what he said.

Home is a place, he said, and I had forgotten. I didn't need to sit hour after hour and a day waiting for Griffis, and I didn't need to go to lectures. I had a home, and I had a duty.

I sent the telegram to Griffis, and I carried the little bag down myself for I was in a great hurry, and I walked around quickly to the Back Bay Station, because I didn't really need, and couldn't wait for, a taxi. . . .

How absurd, really, the trip to town seemed, once I was back in my car and headed for home.

It was the dead time between snow and the first green, but the country became a little more human as I drove back into the hills. And as I came toward my own fields and saw them gleaming golden in the low shafts of the setting sun I had a vague sick feeling of suspense and the elms swerving with the driveway brittle and delicate against the still and golden sky. And as I walked toward the heavy oak door set in a curve of laurels I knew too Home is a Place. And from the small flagged hall where everything still stood about, his racked tennis frames waiting to be sent off, the boots, the old hats waiting, I walked into the living room, and on the long table with candles gutted out there was a litter of wilting roses and white gladioli and blue cineraria and jars of preserves and marmalades and the afghan knitted all winter by our Red Cross women and I stared, stunned at this silent testament from all who had known him in his own home and I held on to the table, and his dogs were raking sharp claws down my arms and through the roaring in my ears I heard a terrible voice cry, "Oh, Harry, Harry, I'll never, never leave you."



## Women's Professions

**T**O BEGIN with the oldest, here is an excerpt from Anita Loos's immortal *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, which epitomizes not only the profession but the spirit of the twenties, when Lorelei and Dorothy appeared serially in *Harper's Bazaar*.

To suggest, then, the enormous change in the professional attitude and status of women since World War I, here is Janet Flanner's painless and profitable résumé in her study of female spies. Long in Paris as the *New Yorker's* "Genêt," she wrote this piece there "because I remarked that busts and romance were being replaced in all women's professions by education, and that whereas a good spyess used to have to be only fascinating in the boudoir, and a good listener, now she had to have a degree from Boston Tech."

To document further the professional attitude toward glamor that has come in with the youngest of the arts, here is a trenchant portrait of a movie star by Cecilia Ager, one of *PM's* cogent editors.

To remind the reader of woman's traditional role of honor as teacher, nurse, and comforter, here is a picture of women in religious orders by Margaret Case Harriman, one of the *New Yorker's* brilliant profilers.

Because woman's basic profession is domestic, no anthology would be complete without the Mother's Helper. (This one belongs to the depression days of the thirties.) Scarcely an anthology is complete without Dorothy McCleary's story, anyway—proof positive that Miss McCleary's forthcoming book on short story writing knows what it's talking about.

Finally, because woman's basic career is, atavistically, something different from all these, here is one of Edita Morris' sparkling and delicious stories laid in Sweden, applicable everywhere.



# Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

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by ANITA LOOS

April 27

**P**ARIS is devine. I mean Dorothy and I got to Paris yesterday, and it really is devine. Because the French are devine. Because when we were coming off the boat, and we were coming through the custom, it was quite hot and it seemed to smell quite a lot and all the French gentlemen in the custom were squealing quite a lot. So I looked around and I picked out a French gentleman who was really in a very gorgeous uniform and he seemed to be a very, very important gentleman and I gave him twenty francs worth of French money and he was very gallant and he really knocked everybody else down and took our bags right through the custom. Because I really think that twenty francs is quite cheap for a gentleman that has got on at least \$100 worth of gold braid on his coat alone, to speak nothing of his pants.

I mean the French gentlemen always seem to be squealing quite a lot especially taxi drivers when they only get a small size yellow dime called a fifty santeems for a tip. But the good thing about French gentlemen is that every time a French gentleman starts in to squeal you can really always stop him with five francs no matter who he is. I mean it is so refreshing to listen to a French gentleman stop squealing, that it would really be quite a bargain even for ten francs.

So we came to the Ritz Hotel and the Ritz Hotel is devine. Because when a girl can really sit in a delightful bar and have delicious champagne cocktails and look at all the really important French people in Paris, I think it is devine. I mean when a girl can sit there and really look at the Dolley sisters and

Pearl White and Maybelle Gilman Corey, and Mrs. Nash, it is beyond words. Because when a girl looks at Mrs. Nash and realizes what Mrs. Nash has got out of gentlemen it really makes a girl hold her breath.

And when a girl walks around and reads all of the signs with all of the famous historical names it really makes you hold your breath. Because when Dorothy and I went on a walk and we only walked a few blocks but in only a few blocks we read all the famous historical names like Coty and Cartier and all the names we all knew by heart I really knew we were seeing something educational at last and I really knew that our whole trip was not a failure. I mean I really try to make Dorothy get educated and have reverence. So when we stood at the corner of a place called the place Vandome if you turn your back on a statue they have in the middle and look up, you can see none other than Coty's sign. So I said to Dorothy, does it not give you a thrill to really realize that that is the historical spot where Mr. Coty makes all the perfume. So then Dorothy said, Yes, she supposed Mr. Coty came to Paris and he smelled Paris and he realized that something had to be done. So Dorothy will really never have any reverence.

So then we saw a jewelry store and we saw some jewelry in the window and it really seemed to be a very very great bargain but the price marks all had francs on them and Dorothy and I do not seem to be mathematical enough to tell how much francs is in money. So we went in and it seems it was only 20 dollars and it seems it is not diamonds but it is a thing called paste which is the name of a word which means imitations. So Dorothy said paste is the name of the word a girl ought to do to a gentleman that handed her one. I mean I would really be embarrassed but the gentleman did not seem to understand Dorothy's english. I mean a gentleman could really deceive a girl because he could give her a present and it would only be 20 dollars. So it really makes a girl feel depressed to think a girl really could not tell. So when Mr. Eisman comes to Paris next week, if he wants to make me a present I will make him take me along with him because he is really quite an inveteran bargain hunter at heart. So the gentleman

at the jewelry store said that quite a lot of famous girls in Paris had imitations of all their jewelry and they put the jewelry in the safe and they really wore the imitations, so they could wear it and have a good time. But I told him I really thought that any girl who was a lady would not ever even think of having such a good time that she did not remember to hang on to her jewelry.

So then we went back to the Ritz. So then we unpacked our trunks with the aid of really a delightful waiter who brought us up some delicious luncheon and who is called Leon and who speaks english almost like an American and who Dorothy and I talk to quite a lot. So Leon said that we really ought not to stay around the Ritz all of the time, but we really ought to see Paris. So while I was getting ready to see Paris, Dorothy said she would go down in the lobby and meet some gentleman to show us Paris. So in a couple of minutes she called up on the telephone from the lobby and she said I have got a French bird down here who is a French title nobleman, who is called a veecount so come on down. So I said How did a Frenchman get into the Ritz. So Dorothy said he came in to get out of the rain and he has not noticed that it is stopped. So I said I suppose you have picked up something without taxi fare as usual. Why did you not get an American gentleman, who always have money. So Dorothy said she thought a French gentleman had ought to know Paris better. So I said he does not even know it is not raining. But I went down.

So then we went to dinner and then we went to Momart and it really was devine.

So the French veecount is going to call up in the morning but I am not going to see him again. Because French gentlemen are really quite deceiving, because I mean they take you to quite cute places and they make you feel quite good about yourself and you really seem to have a delightful time but when you get home and really come to think it all over, all you have got is a fan that only cost 20 francs and a doll that they gave you away for nothing in a restaurant. I mean a girl has to look out in Paris, or she would have such a good time in Paris that she would not get anywheres. I mean I really think

American gentlemen are the best after all, because kissing your hand may make you feel very very good but a diamond and safire bracelet lasts forever.

*April 29*

Yesterday was quite a day. I mean Dorothy and I were getting ready to go shopping and the telephone rang and they said that Lady Francis Beekman was downstairs and she wanted to come upstairs. So I really was quite surprised. I mean I really did not know what to say, so I said all right. So then I told Dorothy and then we put our brains together. Because it seems that Lady Francis Beekman is the wife of the gentleman called Sir Francis Beekman who was the admirer of mine in London who really seemed to admire me so much that he asked me if he could make me a present of a diamond tiara. So it seemed as if his wife must have heard about it, and it really seemed as if she must have come clear over from London about it. So there was a very very loud knock at the door so we asked her to come in. So Lady Francis Beekman came in. Lady Francis Beekman is a quite large size lady who seems to resemble Bill Hart quite a lot. So Dorothy says she thinks that she resembles Bill Hart quite a lot, only she really thinks she looks more like Bill Hart's horse. So it seems that she said that if I did not give her back the diamond tiara right away, she would make quite a fuss and she would ruin my reputation. Because she said that something really must be wrong about the whole thing. Because it seems that Sir Francis Beekman and she have been married for 35 years and the last present he gave to her was a wedding ring. So she said she would ruin my reputation. So Dorothy spoke up and she said Lady you could no more ruin my girl friend's reputation than you could sink the Jewish fleet. I mean I really was quite proud of Dorothy the way she stood up for my reputation. Because I really think there is nothing so wonderful as two girls when they stand up for each other and help each other a lot. Because no matter how vigorous Lady Francis Beekman seems to be, she really had to realize that she could not sink a whole fleet full of ships. So she really had to stop talking against my reputation.

So then Lady Francis Beekman said she knew what kind of a person she had to deal with and she would not deal with any such a person herself because she said it hurt her dignity. So she said she would turn it all over to her solicitor.

*April 30*

So sure enough yesterday morning Lady Francis Beekman's solicitor came. Only he really was not a solicitor, but his name was on a card and it seems his name is Mons. Broussard and it seems that he is an *advocat* because an *advocat* is a lawyer in the French language. So Dorothy and I were getting dressed and we were in our kimono as usual when there was quite a loud knock on the door and before we could even say come in he jumped right into the room. So it seems that he is of French extraction. I mean Lady Francis Beekman's solicitor can really squeal just like a taxi driver. I mean he was squealing quite loud when he jumped into the room and he kept right on squealing. So Dorothy and I rushed into the parlor and Dorothy looked at him and Dorothy said, this town has got to stop playing jokes on us every morning because our nerves could not stand it. So he handed us his card and he never stopped but he squealed and squealed and he really waved his arms in the air quite a lot. So Dorothy said he gives quite a good imitation of the Moulan Rouge which is really a red wind mill, only Dorothy said he makes more noise and he runs on his own wind. So we stood and we watched him for quite a long while, but he really seemed to get quite monotonous after quite a long while because he was always talking in French which really means nothing to us. So Dorothy said lets see if 25 francs will stop him, because if 5 francs will stop a taxi driver, 25 francs ought to stop an *advocat*. Because he was making about 5 times as much noise as a taxi driver and 5 times 5 is 25. So as soon as he heard us start in to talk about francs he seemed to calm down quite a little. So Dorothy got her pocket book and she gave him 25 francs. So he immediately stopped squealing and he put it in his pocket, but then he got out quite a large size handkerchief with purple elefants and he started in to cry. So Dorothy really got discouraged and she

said, look here, you have given us a quite an amusing morning but if you keep that up much longer, wet or dry, out you go.

So then he started in to pointing at the telephone and he seemed to want to use the telephone and Dorothy said, if you think you can get a number over that thing, go to it, but as far as we have found out, it is a wall bracket. So then he started in to telephone so Dorothy and I went about our business to get dressed. So then he finished telephoning. So then he kept running to my door and then he kept running to Dorothy's door, while we were getting dressed and he kept on crying and he kept on talking a lot, but he seemed to have lost all of his novelty to us so we really paid no more attention to him.

So finally there was another loud knock on the door so we heard him rush to the door so we both went in to the parlor to see what it all was and it really was a sight. Because it was another Frenchman. So the new Frenchman rushed in and he yelled Papa and he kissed him. So it seems it was his son because his son is really his papa's partner in the *advocat* business. So then his papa talked quite a lot and then he pointed at I and Dorothy. So then his son looked at us and then his son let out quite a large size squeal, and he said in French "may papa elles sont sharmant." So it seems he was telling his papa that we were really charming. So then Mr. Mons. Brous-sard stopped crying. So it was the first time he was not either squealing or crying, so then he took out his glasses and he put on his glasses and he took a good look at us. So then his son went over and he put up the window shade so his papa could look at us better. So then his papa took quite a good look at us and he really became delighted. So he really became all smiles and he pinched our cheeks and he kept on saying Sharmant all of the time. So then they both looked at us a lot. So then they both were really delighted. So then his son broke right out into english and he really speaks english as good as an American. So then he told us his papa telephoned for him to come over because we did not seem to understand what his papa was saying to us. So he went to the telephone so he ordered a bottle of champagne.

So then he said to his papa, Why do we not ask the charm-

ing ladies to go out to Fountainblo to-day. So his papa said it was charming. So then I said, how are we going to tell you gentlemen apart, because if it is the same in Paris as it is in America, you would both seem to be Monshore Broussard. So then we got the idear to call them by their first name. So it seems that his sons name is Louie so Dorothy spoke up and Dorothy said, I hear that they number all of you Louies over here in Paris. Because a girl is always hearing some one talk about Louie the sixteenth. He must have been a whale of a Louie. So I was really surprised to hear Dorothy get so historical so she may really be getting educated in spite of everything. But Dorothy told Louie he need not try to figure out his number because she got it the minute she looked at him. So it seems his papa's name is Robber, which means Robert in French. So Dorothy started in to think about her 25 francs and she said to Robber, Your mother certainly knew her grammer when she called you that. So Dorothy said we might as well go out to Fountainblo with Louie and Robber if Louie would take off his yellow spats that were made out of yellow shammy skin with pink pearl buttons. Because Dorothy said, fun is fun but no girl wants to laugh all of the time. So Louie is really always anxious to please, so he took off his spats but when he took off his spats, we saw his socks and when we saw his socks we saw that they were something like Scotch plaid with small size rainbows running through them, so Dorothy looked at them a little while and she really became quite discouraged and she said, Well Louie, I think you had better put your spats back on.

So then Leon, our friend who is the waiter, came in with the bottle of champagne. So while he was opening the bottle of champagne Louie and Robber talked together in French quite a lot and I really think I had ought to find out what they said in French because it might be about the diamond tiara. Because French gentlemen are very very gallant, but I really do not think a girl can trust one of them around a corner. So I am going to ask Leon what they said.

So then we went to Fountainblo and then we went to Momart and then we got home very late, and we really had quite a delightful day and night, even if we did not go out shopping

and we did not buy anything. But I really think we ought to do more shopping because shopping really seems to be what Paris is principally for.

May 1

So this morning I sent for Leon who is Dorothy and my waiter friend and I asked him what Louie and Robber said in French. So it seems that they said in French that we really seemed to attract them very very much because they really thought that we were very very charming, and they had not met such girls that were so charming in quite a long time. So it seems that they said that they would ask us out a lot and it seems that they said that they would charge up all the bills to Lady Francis Beekman because they would watch for their chance and they would steal the diamond tiara. So then they said that even if they could not steal it from us, we were really so charming that it would really be charming to go around with us all the time even if they could not steal from us. So no matter what happens they really could not lose.

So then I decided it was time to do some thinking. So then I thought quite a lot. So then I told Dorothy what I thought. So I told Dorothy I thought I would put the real diamond tiara in the safe at the Ritz and then I would buy an imitation of a diamond tiara at the jewelry store that has the imitations that are called paste. So then I could leave the imitation of the diamond tiara lying around on a table a lot, so Louie and Robber could see it quite a lot and they could see how careless I seem to be, so then they could get full of encouradgement. So when we go out with Louie and Robber I could put it in my hand bag and I could take it everywhere, so Louie and Robber could really always feel that the diamond tiara was really always within reach. So then Dorothy and I could go around with Robber and Louie a lot and we could get them to go shopping and we could get them to spend quite a lot. So then every time they seemed to get discouradged, I could open up my hand bag, and I could let them get a glimpse of the imitation of a diamond tiara and then they would become more encouradged and then they would spend some more money.

Because I even might let them steal it at the last, because they were really charming gentlemen after all and I really would like to help Louie and Robber and it would really be quite amusing after all for them to give it to Lady Francis Beekman and she would have to pay them quite a lot and then she would really find out it was only made out of paste after all. Because Lady Francis Beekman has never seen the real diamond tiara and the imitation of a diamond tiara would deceive her, at least until Louie and Robber got all of their money for all of the hard work they did. Because the imitation of a diamond tiara would only cost about 65 dollars and what is 65 dollars if Dorothy and I could do some delightful shopping and get some delightful presents that would really seem even more delightful when we stopped to realize that Lady Francis Beekman paid for them. Because it would really teach Lady Francis Beekman a lesson not to say what she said to two American girls like I and Dorothy, who were all alone in Paris and had no gentleman to protect them.

So when I got through telling Dorothy what I thought, Dorothy looked at me and looked at me and she really said she thought my brains was a miracle. Because she really said my brains reminded her of a radio because you listen to it for days and days and you get quite discouradged and just when you are getting ready to smash it, something comes out that is a masterpiece.

So I really think that everything always works out for the best. Because after all, we really need some gentlemen to take us around in Paris until Mr. Eisman gets to Paris and we could not go around with any really attractive gentlemen because Mr. Eisman only wants me to go out with gentlemen that have got brains. So I said to Dorothy that even if Louie and Robber do not look so full of brains we could tell Mr. Eisman that all we were learning from them was French. So even if I have not seemed to learn French yet, I have really almost learned to understand Robbers english so when Robber talks in front of Mr. Eisman and I seem to understand what he is saying, Mr. Eisman will probly think I know French.

*May 2*

So last night we went to the Foley Bergere. So it really was devine. I mean it was very artistic because it had girls in it that were artist models and they were really in the nude. So one of the girls was a friend of Louie and he said that she was a very very nice girl, and that she lived with her mother, and that she was only 18 years of age. So Dorothy said, she is slipping it over on you Louie because how could a girl get such dirty knees in only 18 years. So Louie and Robber really laughed very very loud. I mean Dorothy was very unrefined at the Foley Bergere, because I always think that when girls are in the nude it is really very artistic and if you have artistic thoughts you really do not think anything but you think it is beautiful and I really would not laugh in an artistic place like the Foley Bergere. Because when people who are artistic go to such a place as the Foley Bergere they do not even mention that girls seem to be in the nude.

So I wore the imitation of a diamond tiara to the Foley Bergere. I mean it really looked just like one and it really would deceive an expert and Louie and Robber could hardly take their eye off of it. But they did not really annoy me because I had it tied on very tight because it would be fatal if they would get the diamond tiara before Dorothy and I take them shopping a lot.

# Fashions in Spies

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by JANET FLANNER

SPYING, for women, has enormously changed. Before the war the female spy was a courtesan. Today, the expert woman secret agent is a college graduate. The pre-war *espionne* of Europe spent her days at the dressmaker's and the races, and her evenings swooning in the arms of international Under Secretaries who obligingly whispered state secrets into her diamond earrings. Her midnights, over champagne suppers, she gave to reporting her days' gleanings to her boss, a handsome military gent in frogged uniform and mustaches. Today an A-1 woman spy (when a government is lucky enough to find one) has the equivalent of a university degree in chemistry or mathematics, or both; chemical formulas, ballistic figures and machinery computations are the basis of up-to-date warfare. She should be a good garage handy man, competent to drive and change tires on half a dozen different makes of secondhand cars. She should be the sporting kind who doesn't get seasick in airplanes or landsick of the discomforts of continuous train travel. In photography, she must be beyond the Brownie-kodak stage and well into the leica-camera class and able to do her own developing in a furnished-flat kitchen sink.

She absolutely must speak English, French, German and ought to know how to read Italian and Spanish newspapers. She must have no political views or fidelities; she must have a remarkably good aural and visual memory (anything important enough to be written down is important enough to be dangerous, if found). She must be both decisive and obedient and never nervous. She mustn't drink. She must have, not a wardrobe of clinging seductive evening gowns, but lots of

woollies for hanging around airports and frontiers on business on cold days. The government that employs her is less interested in her boudoir than in her brain—though successful sex appeal is no more a deterrent in the spy business than in any other. As a matter of record, most of the important women spies who, in the last ten years, have been good enough to be constantly watched and eventually arrested, have been respectably and faithfully married—to men spies.

As for champagne drinking with their boss in the fashion of prewar *espionnes*—the spyess today probably knows nothing about her chief except his cipher number, which she writes to. Even if she knew him personally, he probably wouldn't be good for anything but a beer. Spies spend a lot of their backers' money, but it's in greasing the palms of those who aren't spies. Spies live modestly, even harshly, because that's the way they're paid. In Europe you can get a very decent spy of either sex for around \$3,500 a year, plus grease money.

To appreciate how difficult (and disastrous) spying is for women, it's necessary to cite the famous stars of the profession for the last few decades. They are not numerous. They are exactly two in number. One—she is now in prison serving time for her former remarkable successes—is Mme. Lydia Stahl, a Russian, who was apparently aided, till they both went before the judge, by Mrs. Marjorie Tilley Switz, the acquitted American girl from Vassar College and East Orange, New Jersey. The other really important female spy was Mata-Hari, the Dutch-Javanese dancer. She was so brilliantly successful at spying that she was shot in Paris during the First World War. Mme. Stahl is a college graduate. Mata-Hari was a courtesan. These two are the perfect and opposing prototypes of the two sorts of female spy, cerebral and sensual, which our modern times have developed.

Until Lydia Stahl was arrested in December, 1933, her French friends regarded her as an exceptionally bookish, art-loving private individual. The French secret police saw her as an unusually erudite, cultivated international spy whom they'd had their eye on since 1920 but couldn't catch the goods on till thirteen years later. Even then she was so persistently brainy

that the final round-up took three months, of which the last three days and nights were spent without sleep by detectives who knew she was their mental superior and so were nervous. At the moment when they arrested her, she was studiously occupied with a Chinese translation—of Japan's war plans.

Mme. Stahl was born in Kozlov in 1885, married a landed baron in the Crimea, divorced him in Constantinople, took her degree of Master of Arts at Columbia and her Doctor of Laws at the Sorbonne, was a polyglot who spoke English, French, German, Russian, some Finnish and a few of the Little Russian dialects, and had prepared a thesis on Confucian culture from original sources. In art she was particularly interested in contemporary sculpture. Of her marriage was born a son who died and to whom she was tragically devoted. After her arrest it was found that her largest trunk, as she told the police, contained the little boy's toys. As she didn't tell the police, it also contained photographs from the French Ministry of Marine's secret *dossier* on its coast defenses. In general, her spy work sounded like a dull post-graduate course in political economy—since she specialized in French land and sea armament figures and, above all, in French economic policy.

However, her profession had its moments of gaiety. After she was taken to jail, detectives found she'd pasted French fortification plans on her Paris flat's parlor ceiling and then pasted flowered wallpaper over them—it must have been fun. When she was trying not to be put in jail, she threw off her detective shadowers by shopping in the Trois Quartiers department store; she'd hurry in the Boulevard de la Madeleine side door, lose one detective among the umbrellas, shake off another in the leather goods by the main entrance and slip out through the lipstick and perfume counters by the side door into the Rue Duphot. As part of her lighter spy work, she also had a lover, Professor Louis Martin, code expert for the French Ministry of the Marine. He decoded in twenty languages, was a tall, white-faced, red-haired, middle-aged scholar whose chief complaint, during the seventeen months he was in jail before being tried for espionage and acquitted on a technicality, was that the French jail contained no dictionary in Sanskrit.

I knew Professor Martin for five years, during which time we both lived in the same modest Left Bank Paris hotel. For a man who was a spy, or even for a man who was not, his clothes were extraordinary: he affected a Wild West sombrero and vivid mustard-colored suits which made him noticeable to the whole neighborhood, including the corner policeman. Though he supposedly spoke eight living languages, in all those five years he never said anything to me except, "Pardon," as he politely stood aside in the hotel corridor to let a foreign lady pass. Also, after five years of living in the same third-floor back room, when he moved out—to go live nearer Mme. Stahl—he didn't leave so much as a scrap of paper behind him. Our hotelkeeper's wife thought such tidiness, for a man, remarkable. The police thought it remarkable, too. However, in his new rooms they later found the scraps of paper they were looking for: missing documents from the Ministry of the Marine, marked "Secret—Confidential."

Lydia Stahl's debacle as a really fine spy came from two factors affecting all business today—over-expansion and competition. Though working for the Russian government, she was sold out to the French government by a Finnish counterspy working for the German government. At the time of Mme. Stahl's arrest, she had nine spies in her employ—two French, including one suburban schoolmistress; two Rumanians, man and wife; two Poles, also married; one Serb; and two married Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gordon Switz. Their mixed professions were mostly all high, the list including—besides the schoolteacher and the professor—a sculptor, doctor, dentist, a biological chemist, a journalist, a factory foreman, one hardware merchant, one boiler-maker and one aviator, or, The Aviator, as the American Switz was known to the spies by code.

This was a big business group for one woman to run, and costly; when rounded up, 99,200 francs, or close to seven thousand dollars, in cash, was found on their persons. As the judge said, no French schoolteacher, with her miserable pay, could have ten one-thousand-franc notes sewed in her petticoat and also have a clear conscience. Besides her bad conscience, the

schoolteacher had a short-wave wireless for receiving messages, and a wireless telegraphy set.

Aviator Switz was Mme. Stahl's pay-off man for the band—in more than one sense, unfortunately. He and his wife turned state's evidence when arrested, and according to an old French law benefiting spies who betray other spies, were automatically acquitted at the group trial. The French schoolteacher and the Rumanian wife, who both had babies while awaiting trial, took their babies to court and even took their babies to prison with them. Each got three years. The intelligent Mme. Stahl, who got five years, remained intelligent to the end. As for the Switzes and the rest, she said she'd never heard of them. The only one she knew was Professor Martin. For he, like herself, was a scholar.

As a spy, Mata-Hari was at the opposite pole. She was an unmental woman of mixed North and South blood, half Dutch, half Javanese. Both bloods dominated, giving her the benefit of neither. She was laborious and reliable-minded; she had flesh and coloring which looked exotic. She was not beautiful but had regular features that made up well on the stage. Though under cover a secret agent, she made her public entry into Paris as a professional dancer. In her dances she displayed her lean, lithe muscular limbs and her excellent simple body which lacked corporeal exaggerations and was no more exciting nude than dressed. This was the body which was later to be shot. Though she has enjoyed, especially since her death, the reputation of being *une grande amoureuse*, her real love was the German government, and as a woman and a spy she was faithful to it. When she finally faced the French firing squad, she courageously cried, "Vive l'Allemagne" as her last words.

Ten years before the World War, she was already an important matinal spectacle in Paris when she rode each morning in the Bois de Boulogne. Her androgynous physique looked its best on a horse, which she was careful should always be a dappled gray. She affected a fascinating and old-fashioned equestrian get-up—the top hat with flying veil, the voluminous draped skirt, the tight-fitted coat designed for the Empress Eugénie forty years before. Her street clothes, if more up-to-

date, were pleasantly eccentric, rather than chic; her coats had always an Amazonian touch; she inclined, perhaps because of her unsuspected profession, slightly to the military in her tailoring.

As a dancer in select salons, she was in considerable demand among daring international hostesses. She danced for the great Emma Calvé in her apartment in the then much discussed new glass-maker Lalique's building in the Cour de la Reine. Certainly one of Mata-Hari's most astonishing performances was held in the Neuilly garden of an American lady over a long period noted for her intellectual energy and sardonic social indifference. While duchesses gaped, the spy-dancer made her entry, nearly nude, on a rented, turquoise-blue caparisoned circus horse. (She had wanted to make her entry on a rented circus elephant which the American had thought would be difficult to manage, since there were tea and cookies to follow.) At another and more intimate feminine fete, she engaged herself—at a high price, for she never forgot she was a mercenary—to dance entirely nude before ladies only. In the midst of her number, which was a Javanese warrior's dance, done with weapons, she rightly suspected, because of the large shoes, that one of the assembled ladies was a lady's husband, disguised. She nearly ran him through with her spear, right in the parlor. She was always courageous.

Though she had lived at first in the modest Hotel Balzac in the Etoile quarter, as time and prosperity went on, she moved to the Hotel Crillon. It had two doors, usually useful to a spy—one onto the Place de la Concorde and not too far from the French Ministry of War, and one onto the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, not too far from the President of France's palace. In her Crillon days, Mata-Hari moved up in the world, was much noted at theatres on first nights, in cafés on the right afternoons, made the acquaintance of the snobbish, elegant, limited Robert Montesquiou who was later to be known to the world as Swann in Marcel Proust's remarkable and revelatory novels on Parisian pre-war life. The men who knew her best, though, were the ones who knew her least. These were the unfortunate young French lieutenants who, before and espe-

cially after the war broke out, she made so shameless a set for as to make their confidence and confidences seem strange even to this day. What she wanted from them was endless news of troops; what they wanted from her was a brief story of love. The exchange was, considering the dramatic circumstances, probably equitable.

Mata-Hari has come down in Parisian history as a great courtesan. She was not. A prewar great courtesan was a venal public pretty woman of enormous social influence, who was kept by three millionaires, two dukes, or one royalty, and who, if she knew her business (which she usually did), had no private life or love. Mata-Hari was a prewar *demi-castor*, a precise professional rating lost in the vulgar organic confusions of today. A *demi-castor* was a venal public woman, not necessarily over-pretty and of so little social influence as to be permitted all the private life and love she desired. Mata-Hari desired only one of both—spying for and being devoted to the German military command.

When she was arrested, the evidence of her brilliantly successful competence as a spy was so great that none of her astonished social friends could properly protest. Anyhow, such protests were not frequent during the war in French courts-martial. Mata-Hari was sentenced to be shot by a firing squad of French soldiers in the Paris suburb of Vincennes. Legend states that she dressed for her last moment in a fine mink coat—over her nude dancer's flesh. This is incorrect. She died wearing a neat Amazonian tailored suit, specially made for the occasion, and a pair of new white gloves.

The young French noble who, as officer of the day, was faced with the dreadful duty, afterward said that she stood so still that she made him tremble when, his sabre lifted in honor to one about to die, he gave the command, "Fire!"

# Movie Star Comes to New York

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by CECELIA AGER

THIS time it would be different, she plotted, as she looked in the mirror of her drawing-room on the Century and studied her round blue eyes registering resolve. Automatically she pressed back her upper lashes with a finger skilled not to smudge the mascara. This time it would be different, she reassured herself, holding the thought hard all the while the train tunneled through to Grand Central from 125th Street.

Last time she came to New York, she thought it would be—well, romantic, to come by plane. "Star wings way east," it would say under her pictures in the Los Angeles papers, and it did. She looked swell boarding the plane in her little pink duvetyn fitted suit with the pink ermine Peter Pan collar tied in a pink ermine bow under her chin, one foot—in an extraordinary high-heeled black patent-leather pump with a ribbon bow tumbling all about its short vamp—arched on the stair leading to the cabin, orchids from Hahn's in Beverly Hills pouring over her fully expanded left breast, a gay and brave smile showing her splendid upper teeth and just so much—and no more—of her lower teeth, which were not quite so regular, as Eddie, her studio camera man, allowed. Thank God, she'd had her hair—well, say brightened at Jim's Beauty Parlor yesterday, not today. It always looked more angelic still the day after. Silhouetted against the setting Glendale Airport sun—she hoped some of the boys were catching her in soft focus—the pale gold fuzz at the end of her long bob must be so heavenly any punk producer ought to see that she, and not that gawk of a Hepburn and not that mouse of a Bergner, was the ideal Joan of Arc.

Joan of Arc—from Arkansas. Not bad. Pete in the publicity department kept telling her she was quick. Said she had a rare sense of humor. “Yuma; get it?” he said, last time she flew down to Yuma to get married. Nice story Pete thought up for the May *Movie Madness*. Her picture on the cover, and inside an account of the party she gave to honor dear Olive’s getting out of the hospital after that appendix operation.

So last time, looking—she could positively feel it—more glamorous than Hedy Lamarr, she got in that plane. Olive had planed to New York just before. But, the cat, she didn’t tell her the works. How she’d look by the time the plane got to Newark and news cameras. That, snuggling like a babe all that time in the chair, her tight little skirt would get all sat out across the fanny, make her look like thirty-eight there instead of the thirty-five Pete swore to before a notary the time he took her measurements for his American Venus contest. Oh, no, Olive wouldn’t tell her the sweet golden haze of her hair would get all matted into a ratty snarl from lying on the plane pillow, that her orchids would turn to a dank purple mass, that there were no ice boxes for orchids in those dopey planes—and planes were supposed to be civilized. No, Olive wouldn’t remind her there’d be no studio make-up man aboard, nobody to smooth away the mascara that smudged under her eyes, to blot out with grease-paint the too much of her lower lip that had worn through, to draw fuller with a little chamois stick the bow of her upper lip that had come off. Wouldn’t even tell her about the mean yellow overhead light in the ladies’ room in the Chicago airport. Didn’t even tell her, before she looked in its mirror, to brace herself.

She got so scared peering in that Chicago airport mirror, she could worry only fleetingly whether that was the way she looked when she woke up in bed. She was so scared she forgot everything Pete told her, everything about the Newark photographers, everything about be naughty to one photographer and, through some snide grape-vine system of their own, every photographer in the whole world knows it. By the time the cabin door opened at Newark, she’d drowned in panic.

She shoved her pink ermine collar up around her ears,

pushed her pink felt baby bonnet way down over her eyes, tripped in blind haste down the steps even though the tall, Weissmuller-shouldered pilot with the blue eyes and genuine black lashes himself was helping her alight, and as soon as her feet touched ground, ran. Ran, stumbling in her little high-heeled slippers, to the car. How, she never knew, but she could tell it was the company's car sent to meet her. God watching out for her. In she leaped and grabbed down the curtains. No, she told Bill from the New York office; no, she would not get out, no, no, no. "Bill, are you crazy? Look at me. Just look at me. I can't pose. Do you want to ruin me?"

She didn't pose, but that night she saw her pictures in the tabloids just the same. She was looking back over her shoulder in one, her sat-out skirt curved as if something real were doing it. Another dirty double-crosser caught her as she was feeling her way down the steps, frowning, and on her bad side, too. Pete was mad as hell. The columnists were snooty, the camera men laughed like hyenas, or was it elephants. And the New York office thought that it was sore! People, as she said in her interview in *Variety*, had been perfectly lousy to her.

This time it would be different. First of all, she had bound her hair in a net cap as soon as she got on the Chief at Pasadena, then she told the porter to put her orchids in the refrigerator in the dining-car. She creamed her face, creamed her hands, pulled white cotton gloves over them, and went to bed. She read the movie magazines for a little while, checking up on her space compared to Olive's, was satisfied, and fell asleep. She stayed in bed until the morning the train came to Chicago.

Fred, the make-up man and hairdresser the studio'd sent along on the train—for this was a year later, and she'd climbed—came in and did her. She put on her classic tailored suit, her brown alligator oxfords with leather heels—albeit high ones—snapped diamond and emerald clips over the classic turn-over collar of her oyster white homespun silk shirt, pulled her green Tyrolian felt hat over one eye, very carelessly flung her twelve-skin Russian sable scarf over her shoulders, then let it dip in

back, but saw to it it was caught in the crook of her elbows, and sent to the dining-car for her orchids.

She was ready. Gallant, smiling, friendly, sexy in the home-folks manner. You were home-folksy to the Chicago camera men; you were as pleasant but more classy in the attack, more elegant, with the New York ones. Well, all was forgiven in Chicago, thank God; she'd wired Pete before she entrained again on the Century.

Now, waiting to be taken back, at Grand Central, she rehearsed her performance. This time when she saw the camera men she'd positively sprint toward them. Surprised no end to see them come all the way down to the station to see poor little her, she'd wave, she'd sing out, "Hello, boys. But hello! How nice!" She'd chat till her head spun, she'd smile till her jaws ached. She'd pose sitting perched atop every trunk in the station. She'd cross her legs till paralyzed. She'd be so agreeable she'd die, but die with her good side turned toward the cameras, after she'd steered them away from overhead light. Eddie had begged her to stay away from overhead lights, to look for light in back, in front, at the side, but for God's sake no overheads.

"No, I'm not going to get married," she laughed, her blue eyes blank with candor. "You see, I've *been* married," she said in an off-the-record manner that, she could swear to it, was charming. God bless Pete, they did like her, the reporters, the camera men. They showed it, smiling back at her just with their eyes.

Sweet of the company, and her friends, to send such positively million-dollar productions of flowers to her suite in the Waldorf Towers. Last time she'd stopped at the Warwick, and soon as she'd forgotten how mean everybody'd been to her at Newark, she'd had a swell time. But she wasn't having swell times any more, not if she could remember not to. She was having, rather, chic times. Times with authentic correctness, times suitable to her new standing. She would go to Leon and Eddie's now for a lark, not seriously. She'd make her serious appearances at the Colony. God, how she hated the stuffy place!—everybody jammed together like a mob scene, movie

stars next to God knows who. When she chose to be blithe, she'd go to "21."

She thought about this as she took off her orchids from Hahn's and dreamily regarded the spiral curved wires, wrapped round slick with purple ribbon that pinwheeled out of the stems. Now that was Hollywood. In New York you sent for orchids, and they came tied with some sort of lousy bow at the top. Lousy? Sure, lousy. Lousy was chic, damned chic. That fat Duchess something who was so stinking rich and nuts about movie actors—sometimes she did land a featured player leading man if she could catch one worrying between options—she said lousy, and she had a castle in Spain. She'd seen the photographs of it when she was waiting for a fitting at Oscar's, her costume designer at the studio.

Before she left Oscar told her she'd better be photographed for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* or she might as well cut her throat, and cut his heart out at the same time. She was willing. It was up to Lillian, that girl in the New York publicity office assigned to fashion magazines. Sure she'd pose, after a decent touch of indifference. She'd pose, and she'd pose like Eddie kept telling her—leaning back against something, kneeing in with one leg so the camera'd catch the line of her thigh, breathing in for the smallest possible waistline, the flattest diaphragm, the highest, farthest apart spread to her bosom. Eddie suggested that if she could be lighted from below at this moment, strong men would grow weak in their eagerness. That Eddie!

She'd have to get some clothes. She didn't like to, without Oscar to guide her—they always fought, Oscar and she, but she knew in her heart he was right—some months he got almost as much space in the fan magazines as she did. But she'd get them, if only to burn up Olive. Already enterprising shopkeepers who'd read the advance publicity releases in the papers announcing her arrival had started calling up, sending wires; there was a whole pile of letters from them on her es-cri-toire. That's just what it was. That's what the chap who did her new house called the desk; he said it all the time.

But nobody who telephoned her could be any good. Too anxious. No, she'd get her clothes where Joan and Norma

got theirs. She'd go to John-Frederics, she'd go to Hattie Carnegie—she'd promised her saleswoman in the Hollywood Mag-nin's she'd remember her to Hattie. So she told the secretary the New York office had engaged for her to call and announce her arrival. And then she got scared; she wished Oscar, some real friend would go with her, someone to yell at her that her taste stank.

So the little movie star went to John-Frederics and Hattie Carnegie. Her beautifully shaped head measured twenty-one and a half, and John was entranced. She was so lovely and such an inspiration, he must create hats for her, for her alone, and he did. She was so spectacular, nothing less would do. And so John put veils on only the hats he thought best and he allowed no feathers at all. He dramatized her eyes and the fine, high curve of her cheek. Sometimes he tied bows under her chin, for her chin was young and firm. He wrought evening head-dresses for her out of velvet blue flowers like her eyes, he tossed little peaked caps at her like the imp in her smile. She was so grateful, so modest, so "human," that when the little modistes in the workroom peeked through the door, they swooned with ecstasy at the sight of her and went home that night sanctified, finer people for having looked upon one so marvelous as she. At Hattie Carnegie's, Hattie herself chose models for her, suggested a rhinestone frog on the Molyneux mantle instead of the soutache one that fastened the original. Only garments of one color were fit to adorn her, she was herself so vivid, said Hattie; they were more arresting, wrapping high at her throat, billowing wide at her shoulders, caressing her waist and hugging her smooth rounded flanks in passing. She must have silver and gold and softest velvet. She must have little suits and silver foxes swirling over and under her arms. When the fitters came to fit her, they marveled to find she wore only satin Lastex panties, and no brassière at all. They marveled also at the way she whirled her arms round and round in their sockets before the mirror, testing the garments for the slightest whisper of pull across her breasts. She must be ready at any moment to lift her arms overhead, she explained, for that's the way she posed for the still blown-up to three times

life size over the box-office at the Capitol, and that was the hottest still she'd ever made, the wise old exhibitors said.

Miss Penn sent a man up with bags, Steichen photographed her for *Vogue*, and Munkacsy for *Harper's Bazaar*. She walked through Saks Fifth Avenue in a black Schiaparelli suit buttoned up to her chin and the black antelope Mennonite bonnet it inspired John to devise, wearing for color only sky blue suede gloves that matched her eyes, and all the good people in Saks were transfixed.

She went to the French Casino and put on a show as good as it. She went to El Morocco and was such a demonstration of personal power, she bested the artificial zebra stripings in back of her. She went to the openings and she saw that everybody saw; she caught on quickly to the timing for that. She saw that everybody saw, too, that she was charming to the auto-graph hounds, the pests. She went to the Sixty Club at the Pierre and sat at a ringside table and didn't dance too much for she knew a night club didn't rate that. She lunched at the Colony, she brooded beautifully with some intellectual writers at "21."

Fred, the make-up man, attended her every day. Everywhere she went people exclaimed at her beauty. "She is so much more beautiful in the flesh!" they murmured, when they could catch their breaths as she went by. "So sweet, so stunning, so poised!" they ran to tell their friends, quivering from the shattering experience of having seen her.

One afternoon the company engaged the Perroquet Suite at the Waldorf and invited the press to meet her, and everybody came because everybody knew her company served bonded rye. The press did not mind that she showed up and the publicity staff were stoics anyway.

In the beginning she sat straight and tense in a great big chair by the fireplace because she was keeping her promise to Pete to hold a glass, all right, but for the love of God for my sake this time don't drink out of it. She smiled and nodded her head in grave politeness at the guests the younger members of the staff presented to her. She did all this and extended her little hand with understanding friendship to the ones Tom

brought over, for these would be the big shots because Tom was chief of staff.

When their presentations were over, the guests took up their positions in proper order of movie star publicity party precedence. The writers from the fan magazines regarded her from the greatest distance, the commentators from the trade papers held the middle ground, and the critics on the New York dailies eddied close. At last the publicity staff itself admitted that now she was sitting on the floor and gave the cue permitting the guests to stop pretending not to notice. Now staff and guests alike smiled their good fortune at being present at so charming a display of naturalness and the fan magazine writers stiffened in turn as each suddenly recognized the "personality" lead for their story.

Sometimes she could think of something to say, and sometimes she just smiled. Who would believe that this little dame is the ogre who can rate you four stars in the *Daily News*, she marveled as she struggled to woo four stars for her next release; who would guess that the man who was so despairing to read in the *New Yorker* would be so much fun to know. Most of all she admired the fair young man from the *Tribune* because, though everybody warned her he was simply livid with brains, he was easiest of all to talk to. She could understand every word he said.

Suddenly she knew something she had always suspected: she had brains herself, besides beauty and talent and a hell of a lot of sex appeal. Right then she resolved to pay more attention to the preparation of her pictures when she got back to the studio. A girl with her brains owed it to the company.

The little movie star halted her parade down the carpet leading to the Century and waved good-by to the news cameras with a new radiance in her smile. A little of it left when the autograph hounds broke loose and surged around her, but she saved most of it, for the camera men were still there.

All the way back she was happy musing over her success. Olive wouldn't have to take her word for it this time, she had the clippings to show.

When she got back to the studio everybody wondered at the

change in her. What, they asked each other in the front office, has got into our little Toots. She was choosing stories, she was picking writers, she was saying "montage." But when it was brought to the big boss that she was talking about changing her make-up, he knew the time had come to act. She must have met a writer, he doped it out, and right away he knew what to do.

She's just scammed into Oscar's, his scouts reported, and when the big boss dropped in he found her telling Oscar of the new silhouette she wanted him to use as a basis for her next set of costumes. The big boss listened for a little while and nodded his head in agreement, because it warmed his heart to watch Oscar burn. Oscar spluttered when he burned and the big boss thought that was very comical. But the big boss was a busy man and so presently he said to her, "Tap dancing's become a terrific thing while you've been away. You know how?"

She took up tap dancing and it was very hard. It made her very tired and so she took sun baths afterward. Tap dancing required all her concentration because you had to count, and she couldn't think while she was taking her sun baths because it was too warm. She was very sad whenever she realized there was no time left for her to remember she had brains, too, and often she felt a little guilty that the company had to take care of the preparation of her pictures all by itself. But what could she do. Olive already knew tap dancing. That was the advantage of getting your start in life as a chorus girl instead of as a manicurist. Beautician, she corrected herself.

# Sister

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*by* MARGARET CASE HARRIMAN

THE black-robed women, veiled in black, who daily ride in the subways, walk with their characteristic light, quick step through the city streets and sometimes solicit alms for the poor in shops and hotels, are generally referred to by the lay public as nuns. Actually they are not nuns, they are sisters. A sister is a member of a religious community actively engaged in nursing, teaching or otherwise caring for the poor. A nun is a woman who has entered a cloistered community and who never leaves the convent, where she spends her days in meditation and prayer.

Probably the strictest order of nuns is the Cloistered Carmelites who have about twenty convents throughout the United States, notably in the Santa Clara Valley and at Carmel-by-the-Sea in California. A Carmelite, passing her life in incessant prayer, learns to pray as readily as she breathes because her order considers that to stop praying marks the death of the soul as a cessation of breathing marks the death of the body. If a Carmelite is obliged to speak to a person from the outside world she does so from behind a screen, or—if the screen on occasion is dispensed with—through a thick veil which covers her face. She fasts for eight months in the year, and is called from prayer and meditation in her cell only to engage in required manual labor, making scapulars, rosaries, shrouds and, in certain Carmelite communities, digging her own grave. If she has a special talent, she may spend her working hours in painting, writing or music, or doing fine embroidery. In the periods of "the great silence" all work that might make any noise is abandoned and the nuns, moving silently in their woven

sandals, never speak. For weeks at a time the ticking of the convent clock is the only sound within its walls.

There is not much to be known about nuns like these; they are forever gone from the world. But the sisters! Sisters of Mercy, of Charity, Little Sisters of the Poor, and sisters of a hundred other orders move daily among us, remote in their black habits and, somehow, inscrutable. They are, in their hearts, as holy and as consecrated as the most cloistered nun; yet their incessant contact with the world and with its most desperate aspects has given them a quality of understanding and the kind of humor known only to those who look continually upon sad things. They are women whom you can get to know, women you find laughing with you, whose slow turn of the black bonnet, somber in profile, is apt to reveal a raised eyebrow, a sudden smile, or an unexpected, unquenched sparkle in the eye. Few things are more surprising or more engaging than a sister's face when finally she turns to look at you.

There are so many orders and sisterhoods, each with its own rules, garb, and customs, that one brief article cannot attempt to classify, describe, or even mention all of them. This piece must be taken by the reader to refer to some communities, not to all. Customs vary with each community.

The vocation, or calling, to enter a sisterhood is something that few laymen can understand; but it is as real as any girl's worldly ambition to become an opera singer, for instance, or a writer. The popular notion that a woman renounces the world and enters a convent because of a disappointment in love turns out to be, upon investigation, just a popular notion. If you ask a sister why she joined a sisterhood, she is apt to look at you and say, simply, that she had the vocation. A girl who wants to become a nun or a sister goes first, after consultation with a priest, to the mother-superior of the order which she wants to join. Upon the priest's recommendation she is accepted for a period of postulancy lasting six months. Generally she is required to bring with her enough underclothing and linen to last the postulancy, and a dowry averaging around two hundred dollars. Some communities, however, require no dowry. The

postulant wears a little blue or black dress, scrubs the floors and does as she is told. At the end of six months, if she still wants to enter the order, and the order still finds her acceptable, her hair is cropped and covered with a veil, and she enters into a novitiate lasting two years. Just before she takes the final vows, in some communities, the novice lets her hair grow long enough to be curled on her neck so that the mother-superior, in the final ceremony, may cut the curls with a pair of golden scissors. The novice taking the veil is dressed like a bride, in white. In an incredibly beautiful ceremony she consecrates herself to God and receives the habit of the order, the girdle, the cord and the rosary. A nun entering a cloistered order then retires from the world. A sister entering an active order has, on the other hand, just begun to live. Nuns and sisters alike take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The vow of poverty means that a sister or a nun gives up all of her worldly possessions—although the mother-superior may allow her to keep certain books and holy pictures—and that whatever money she has, or inherits after she enters the order, goes to the community. In most orders a sister who finds the life uncongenial (there are not many) may leave at the end of three or five years, according to the rules of the community; in such cases her dowry is returned to her intact. Although she renounces luxury, a sister need not go without comforts; she may have a hot-water bottle in bed on cold nights, for instance, and she may accept such presents from friends in the outside world as umbrellas (the umbrella must be black), handkerchiefs or books. If a friend brings her a box of candy or a like frivolous gift, she is generally required to ask the mother-superior for permission to keep it. Some sisterhoods such as the Little Sisters of the Assumption are allowed to accept no presents at all. The Little Sisters of the Assumption nurse the sick poor of any creed, race or color in their own homes, their mission being to maintain peace and order in homes which among the poor generally fall into chaos when a member of the family becomes seriously ill. The sisters nurse the patient and in the intervals, roll up their sleeves and scrub the floor, cook the dinner, mind the baby and otherwise reassure the family

frightened and shattered by calamity. They must put up with the peevishness of patients who, faithful to slum traditions, generally refuse to have any window opened; if a sister unobtrusively raises the sash an inch or so, the patient almost always begins to cough alarmingly and to beg her not to kill him with cold air. For these attentions the sisters take no pay, and if a grateful patient comes around later and leaves a home-baked cake, for instance, at the convent, they must find out who brought it and see that it is returned. Only flowers are acceptable, because they are for the altar, not for the sisters themselves. For all these rigid rules, the nursing sisters maintain a friendly and lasting relationship with their charges. At the convent of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in New York City—a red brick house in East Fifteenth Street, with wide windows facing on Gramercy Park—the doorbell rings sometimes twenty times a day to admit some neighbor who wants the sisters to know that Jimmy won a prize in school, or that “that one” is drinking again, or sometimes, more cheerfully—that he hasn’t touched a drop since the sister visited the house, and he feels so proud about it would the sister, maybe, drop around and give him a word of praise?

Some sisters may not eat in public except when traveling on a church mission, when they may eat in dining-cars. Others, of different orders, may drop in somewhere for lunch, if they get cold or hungry going about town in their work. Occasionally a sister may find herself lunching with a friend at a Voisin or a Ritz, but she usually prefers not to, unless she can be sure of sitting in an inconspicuous corner. For pocket-money and carfare in their ordinary excursions about the town, the sisters apply to the bursar of the convent who gives each sister the amount she requires. If a sister has a little cash left over and sees something in a store which she feels she really needs in her work, she may buy it, but not unless she is pretty sure beforehand that the mother-superior would approve. She may take a taxi in emergencies caused by weather, pressure of time, or illness, but she may not take a taxi just because she is tired. By seven o’clock she should be within the convent walls. At nine she is in bed with the lights out.

Life in the convents has a joviality and a sparkle that would surprise a good many people who remain pretty much in awe of the women they call nuns. Although a sister's life is a hard one—she gets up at five in the morning and spends her day in work and prayer until bedtime—there is always leisure for little parties on each sister's Feast Day. The Feast Day is the anniversary of the death of the saint from whom a sister has taken her name. Usually, in the convent, there is a sister who can play the piano, one or two who can sing and, sometimes, one who can play the violin. On Feast Days they have music and refreshments, and a special treat of some kind for supper. A good deal of laughing goes on in the convents; the sisters laugh at simple things and they laugh quietly and easily. Their life has broadened considerably in the last few years. Some communities maintain houses at the seashore where the sisters, in summer, can go for a rest; there, they play games on the beach and go in swimming—wearing, of course, modest bathing-suits with sleeves and skirts and long black stockings, but with bathing-caps as scarlet, or as blue or as orange as yours or mine. Ordinarily sisters may not go to see a play unless it is an entertainment given by the Church; but when, one year, certain motion picture executives (possibly with an eye to the League of Decency) invited all the sisters in the archdiocese of New York to special showings in New York theatres, the sisters saw *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and Shirley Temple in *Bright Eyes*, and enjoyed them all very much. Intellectually their field has also widened. Some hundreds of sisters are now enrolled at Fordham, Columbia University and New York University, taking courses in teaching, languages and other subjects to equip themselves for their work.

Generally a novice is a virgin, but a widow may enter into some communities. The order of the Sisters of Charity was founded by a widow—Elizabeth Seton who, left penniless with five children at thirty-three, became converted from the Episcopalian faith to the Catholic because, as she explains in her letters, the Catholic religion offered her the privilege of going to church *every* day, not just on Sundays. When some of her relatives and friends also became converted, she made arrange-

ments for the care of her children (an example which widows entering sisterhoods are still urged to follow) and, in Baltimore in 1809, established the Sisters of Charity, an order based upon the Sisters of Charity founded in France some two hundred years earlier. In its first days the order was so poor that the sisters, unable to pay the price asked for tea, invented a kind of coffee made of carrot-juice and treacle and, for Sunday dinner, generally had nothing but salt herring and molasses on rye bread. The Sisters of Charity now operate schools, hospitals and homes for the aged all over the country; they conduct St. Vincent's Hospital and the College of Mount St. Vincent in New York; at the New York Foundling Hospital in East Sixty-eighth Street, the Sisters of Charity, busy with their work of nursing orphans and foundlings and placing them in good homes, still retain the garb worn by Mother Seton during the days of her widowhood—a black robe and a black silk cap with a starched ruffle; the ruffle has now been altered to a stiff, bonnet-like hood, concealing rather than framing the face.

It is pretty generally known that nuns and sisters come from all walks of life. A visitor to almost any convent will see more than one sister with a fine, thin face and long, aristocratic hands, chapped from work and weather and want of care. The mother-superior of one convent school in Maryland was, before she entered the sisterhood, the daughter of a family which, for generations, had raised thoroughbred horses in Lexington, Kentucky; all the horses used in riding classes at the convent were shipped there by her family.

Probably no Washington drawing-room could offer an assembly of women in more vital intellectual contact with the world than are the nuns of the Sacred Heart, although the nuns may never leave the convent grounds. They are women of fine intelligence and charm, and they keep up a lively interest in world affairs, sustained by visits from their families and friends who, like themselves, are generally people of exceptional quality. It is not unusual to find a nun of the Sacred Heart discussing topics of the day with a surer knowledge than most women ever achieve, because her brother, cousin, or family friend who is something pretty important in the government or in the

world of finance, has come from Washington or New York on visiting-day to talk to her.

At the opposite extreme to women like these there are the derelict, the frightened women who want to become nuns. For them there is the Order of Magdalens, a branch of the House of the Good Shepherd. The House of the Good Shepherd is a semi-cloistered order of the Catholic Church, but it allows a certain number of its nuns to go into the world on business connected with the work of the order. That work is chiefly with delinquent girls committed by the courts to the care of the Good Shepherd. Sometimes a girl, who may be anywhere from eleven to sixteen years old, stays after she has served her term and enters the Order of Magdalens, a contemplative sisterhood composed entirely of penitents. The Magdalens live apart from the nuns of the Good Shepherd except on the day of their patroness, St. Mary Magdalen, when the nuns join them in their hours of recreation. A Magdalen does manual labor but can never enter into the work of the Good Shepherd. She is allowed to help only by her prayers. Forever humble in her brown robe, she can never aspire to the white habit of the Good Shepherd. But the Magdalens are content, just as the daughters of the rich are content, and as all women, when they have entered a sisterhood, seem strangely at peace. Perhaps it is because they belong, then, to the multitude of women who, in a complicated and nervous world, have at last found simplicity.

# Mother's Helper

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by DOROTHY MC CLEARY

THAD been a mistake, maybe, to come rushing here full tilt without a bite of lunch, without even a nickel package of soda crackers to eat on the sly. But in the excitement and hope. . . .

"Your name?" asked the mother, looking up from her book, and not even asking her to sit down.

"Miss Noe."

"Snow?"

"Miss Noe," she said again, this time a little apologetically. "Miss Sarah Noe. N-o-e, you see. . . ." She gave a nervous, self-conscious laugh. "It's an old name—it's of English extraction. My eldest brother was a physician in the—"

"Age?"

"Well—over twenty-one, I always say," she began coquettishly; but seeing the look in the lady's eyes, she stopped, flushing. "Fifty-three," she half whispered.

"And you've had no experience, you say?"

"Oh, indeed no, I didn't say that. I mean I didn't *mean* to say that. I've been around children all my life." She smiled brightly, showing a row of very dainty false teeth; a dimple, still very active, winked in her left cheek. Her eyes were of a sad light blue.

"But no experience as a *mother's helper!*" said the other, with a show of exasperation. "The agency clerk told me that much over the phone, just now."

"Oh, yes, in a manner of speaking—yes, you're quite right," said Miss Noe. "This is my first—this *would* be my first opening of the kind, if you cared to consider me, that is." Oh, do, do, do, do, dol she begged, under her breath.

The lady tapped her nails against the arm of her chair while she looked at Miss Noe's high-laced shoes. "Of course, you've had no training whatsoever in the modern psychology of child care."

"But little children . . . , " said Miss Noe frantically, "they're just the very same as they ever were!"

"Oh, no, that simply is not true. However, I'm willing to give you a trial—this afternoon, if you're prepared to stay."

Miss Noe's heart jumped. "Now?" she cried. "Oh, indeed, I can! Indeed, yes!" She began to fumble at her black gloves. "Only . . . only, first I must. . . ." But how could she say, "I must have a piece of bread and butter, I just must!"

"Your charge is fifty cents an hour?"

"That's it," said Miss Noe, nodding effusively.

"That will mean no meals here, of course." The lady rose and looked at the clock. "Two-ten," she noted aloud. "But, Sarah, you may ask the cook to give you a cup of tea sometime during the afternoon. You're entitled to that much—and I want you to feel at home here with us. If we get along well together I shall need you two afternoons a week. Four hours that is, twice a week. And possibly a little later, if you give satisfaction. . . ."

Miss Noe's lips trembled with happiness. "I promise you faithfully," she cried, "you will never regret—"

"I'll go up to the nursery with you, myself. Take your wraps off, then, and put them in that cloak closet. My name is Mrs. Spahn. There are three children."

Miss Noe pulled off her gloves, fastened them together with one of the snappers, and put them in her coat pocket. Inside the closet she hurried out of her coat, self-conscious under Mrs. Spahn's eye. "Dear me!" she exclaimed, looking down at the old gray sweater she wore under her coat; it had a hole in each elbow. "The days are so raw this time of year," she said nervously, "it's best to wear something—some old thing—under the outer wrap, don't you think so?" But Mrs. Spahn said nothing. "All ready now," called Miss Noe, tearing off her rubber sandals and tossing her hat up on a hook without even taking time to feel her front hair, to fluff it out a little.

Mrs. Spahn led the way up a wide slippery staircase. Miss Noe followed, her hand on the banister, her eyes on Mrs. Spahn's back, with its rich purple covering; there was a little purple cape with fur tassels on it floating down from her shoulders and waving at every step. It was quite a sight. Miss Noe kindled with pure admiration of it. And her heart felt near to bursting with happiness: four dollars a week assured! Her rent to Mrs. Broderick, three dollars; that left only one dollar over, for food and carfare—but today was only the beginning. Four dollars for just two little afternoons, what a godsend! "I thank Thee, Lord," she whispered, with her eyes on Mrs. Spahn's cape, "for Thy Fatherly care." She began to feel quite gay. Now if she only had a little something in her stomach to steady her. . . .

"Here's the nursery," said Mrs. Spahn.

They entered, the sudden brightness of the yellow walls causing Miss Noe to blink her eyes. "My, oh, my," she exclaimed. In the center of the room, on a rocking horse five feet high, sat a little boy, staring at her. "This is Bruce," said Mrs. Spahn. "Where's Rosemary, Bruce?" Bruce pointed to the clothes press. A little girl with flushed cheeks came out, carrying a big doll. She looked up at her mother with an angelic expression. "Mother," she asked, "now can I have a piece of the big cake?"

"Cake!" said Mrs. Spahn sharply. "So Nana told you about the cake, did she, after I gave explicit orders—" She turned to Miss Noe. "Of course, they mayn't have any cake. I hope I can trust you to see to it. Children, this is Sarah—she's going to take care of you while Nana's out."

"Oh, dear," said Bruce, "Nana's always out." He kicked at his horse.

"They've had the same nurse ever since they were born," said Mrs. Spahn to Miss Noe. "But circumstances have arisen. . . . It may be that I must make a c-h-a-n-g-e," she spelled. "Now the *baby*," she continued, "is taking his nap in Nana's room. Come here."

Tiptoeing, Miss Noe followed her to the door and looked in. Her eyes lighted up as she made out, in the darkened room, a

little hand laid up over the pillow, and a patch of yellow ringlets. "Ah, the little sweetheart," she whispered.

"Remember, please, you are not to fondle him!" said Mrs. Spahn sternly. "I permit the nurse to take him up only for changing or feeding." She walked over to a little bulletin board hanging behind the door. "Just consult this piece of paper, Sarah—it tells you everything. Let me see, now." She took up her lorgnette and examined the paper with studious attention. "Two-thirty, Baby gets his bottle," she announced. "Three o'clock, children outdoors. . . . But that we must omit today, because of the rain. And what is this? Such *handwriting!* Or violet ray, she says. But of course you have had no experience with the violet-ray machine, Sarah. No, omit that." She sighed.

"I know how to run that old machine," said Bruce. "You put on the goggles and take off your clothes and turn it on, that's all."

"Fifteen minutes, fifteen minutes," shouted Rosemary. "Two minutes for the baby. *I* know."

"Back and front," said Bruce.

"Pay no attention to them," said Mrs. Spahn. She looked at her watch. "Just manage as best you can," she finished hurriedly. She stepped over to a long mirror and studied herself for a moment. Lifting her lip, she took a long serious look at her teeth. "Just consult the bulletin board, Sarah," she said. She hurried from the room without a backward glance.

The children ran to a window to see their mother get into the car. A tall, mustachioed chauffeur arranged a rug over her knees, tucking it in carefully under her feet. "I hate that old Harry!" said Bruce, stamping his foot. "Old Harry! When I'm six years old I'll get a pistol and shoot 'im."

"Old Harry, old Harry," yelled Rosemary.

Miss Noe approached the big hobby-horse and looked at it with awe. She felt of its brown mane—it was real horse's hair. And the great brown eye, so large and fiery that it actually frightened her to look into it, had a perfect eyelid, with lashes. Miss Noe ran her finger along them. Real horse's eyelashes, as sure as she stood there. And the ears? Leather—but how soft, how earlike. "Nice horsie," she cooed, stroking its hard flank.

Bruce was at her side instantly. "Stop that," he said. "He's mine. Nobody can touch him, only me and Nana."

Miss Noe drew back. "Oh, but I wouldn't think of *hurting* him any, dear. He's such a beautiful horsie, I just wanted to pat him. But if you don't want me to, if you prefer that I. . . ."

Bruce climbed the horse and began to ride it violently up and down, back and forth. "Now we've gone off and you can't get us," he called.

Miss Noe's feelings were hurt. Sharp little stabs, like pin-pricks, beat against her cheeks and neck. Suddenly she felt a hot hatred for this little boy. "Little boy," indeed! She looked at his head, small, flattish, with the hair cut like a man's and growing low at the back, the point of it reaching almost to the middle of his neck. The nasty, dreadful fellow! she thought, as though he were already a man grown.

Rosemary was back in the clothes press again. Presently there came the sound of a telephone bell. "Hello," said Bruce, stopping his horse.

"Hello," came from Rosemary. "Who is this?"

"This is Dr. Morgan."

"Oh, good morning, Doctor."

"Good morning. Who is it?"

"This is Nana. Have you got a dear little baby for me this morning?"

"Yes, I believe I have," replied Bruce. "I'm comin' to your house right now this minute."

"Fine and dandy!" shouted Rosemary. "I got its clothes all ready."

"Ask me," muttered Bruce in an undertone.

"Good-by, Doctor."

"Ask me, *ask me!*" Bruce cried in a fury.

"Oh, yes. Boy or girl?"

"Boy," said Bruce.

"Oh, fine and dandy."

"No, I forgot . . . girl."

"Oh, all right."

The doctor jumped from his horse and ran into the clothes press. Rosemary bounded out, carrying the doll in her arms.

She came and laid the doll in Miss Noe's lap. "See my little baby," she said. "She's just newborn."

Miss Noe did not like this game at all. "Yes, it's a lovely dolly," she said, stroking its fancy wig. "What's its name?"

"Why, its name—why, I haven't named it yet; it's just newborn, good *gracious!*"

"And what's your name?" asked Miss Noe.

"Rosemary Turner Spahn, and my brother's is Bruce Judge Spahn the third, and my daddy's name's Bruce Judge, and *his* daddy was named Bruce Judge."

"Lots of Bruce Judges," said Bruce. "Always have to be a Bruce Judge."

"Many, many, many," said Rosemary, "many, many, many—"

"Stop it!" Bruce stepped on her foot. Rosemary screamed, threw the doll to the floor, and slapped Bruce in the face. Miss Noe, terrified, got tremblingly to her feet. "Now, now," she began.

But the fracas was already over. Bruce went to a corner of the room and began to build with his erector set, while Rosemary fell to undressing the doll, murmuring to herself as she did so, "Many, many panties, many, many, many, many shoes. . . ."

"I'm not needed here," thought Miss Noe, sitting tensely on the edge of a chair. She had pictured this kind of work so differently. Children on her lap, children kneeling in a little group around her while she read to them from *Mother Goose*. And the singing games! She remembered from years ago the games she used to play. *London Bridge is falling down, King William was King James's son, Oats, peas, beans, and barley grows . . .* why, her head was crammed with them. There was nothing she would have liked better than to join in a great crowd of little children, taking hands in a circle and singing, "Go in and out the windows, go in and out the windows."

Good gracious, she *was* singing it. For she saw Bruce looking at her. "We got that piece," he said. "Put it on." He ran to the table and pointed out to her a collection of toy phonograph records. "Find it, find it!"

Miss Noe looked through them eagerly. There was *Farmer*

*in the Dell, London Bridge.* . . . Miss Noe was so pleased that she could have jumped up and down. "Here it is, here it is," she cried. "How do you put it on?" Bruce took it and laid it deftly on the disk, wound the crank, and lo, sure enough, a great big baritone voice began to sing. "Go in—and out—th' wind-hoos," Oh, it was beautiful to hear! Miss Noe sat down in a little rocking chair and covered her face with her hands. "That carries me back, children," she said, "back to when I was a little girl no older than Rosemary here."

"Put on Nana's piece," said Bruce, stopping the machine in the middle of the song.

"Oh, no," pleaded Miss Noe, "let this one finish, dear, *please*."

"No." He snatched the piece off. "Put on Nana's. Here." He handed her a big record with a red center. "Put it on."

"Well then, *you* put it on, dear. I'm afraid Miss Noe doesn't understand much about phonographs."

"Don't you know how to put on a *phonograph* record?" asked Bruce. "Why, everybody knows how to put on a phonograph record. Everybody in the whole world! Don't you know how to?" He burst into hearty laughter and ran and threw himself against his hobby-horse, clinging, helpless with laughter, to its mane.

Miss Noe, bitterly humiliated, felt tears start to her eyes. Oh, I hate you, I hate you, she said, inside of herself, turning her back to Bruce. She put the record on the disk, fumbling through her tears to make the center peg come up through the hole. This done, she plucked spitefully at the little lever at the front and was surprised and half frightened to hear the music begin. "There, see, you bad boy?" she said triumphantly.

"You didn't wind it!" Bruce shouted. He galloped to the box and gave the handle two or three good turns, looking up the while into Miss Noe's face with a taunting smile.

Well, anyhow, this was a good, lively tune. Miss Noe began to nod her head in time to it.

"That's *Love Me Tonight*," Bruce told her, wrinkling his eyes almost shut in his delight. "You wait, now, you'll hear it."

Suddenly a terrible, great voice shot forth from the box:

“Lu-uve me tonight,  
Girl o’ my heart.  
In thy sweet embrace  
My troubles depart—  
Lip to lip and heart to heart,  
Soul to soul, oh, girl o’ my heart,  
Love me tonight!”

Miss Noe listened, fascinated. What a lovely, lovely voice! She did love singing so much; how it warmed the heart! What good company it was! If only I had a little phonograph like that, she thought to herself, I’d ask nothing more in the world.

“That’s Nana’s piece,” said Bruce. “But she don’t put it on, only if Mother’s gone out. She ain’t allowed to play it.”

A low, choking wail came from the next room. “That’s my brother,” said Bruce. “You go get him.”

I wonder how much one would cost, thought Miss Noe, as she hurried in to-attend to the baby. Two or three records would be enough at first. Oh, one record would do me! Maybe if all went well, and she could make four dollars a week, then eventually, after her debt to Mrs. Broderick was all paid. . . . She saw the phonograph already bought and installed on the little square table by her bed. She could even manipulate it from bed. A tune the last thing at night, the first thing in the morning. She caught up the baby in a frenzy of joy. “O my Father which is in heaven,” she breathed eagerly, as she got ready a clean, newly powdered diaper, “do please grant this that Thy servant asks of Thee.”

She pulled up the window shades and stood looking out for a moment, the baby laid cozily over her shoulder. She looked passionately up at the heavens, praying with her whole being. “A phonograph—a phonograph—just a little *tiny* one!” she begged. “But first, if it could be arranged, maybe a little something to eat—just something to stay me so that I can do my very best, here! Then, from today on, everything will be different—won’t it?” She scanned the sky, hoping as she had hoped time upon time for a miracle, a sign. But the sky was pearl gray; a fine mist fell thwartingly between sky and earth.

Oh, why could there not be some assurance? Supposing some day—if she watched long enough—a great cloud were to part, roll billowingly in two like the curtains at the theatre; and in the cleared blue space—or perhaps the space would be of pure gold—*Something* would appear! And bow, and look with large kindly eyes down in the general direction of Miss Noe.

“My brother wants his bottle,” said Bruce, thumping with his fist against Miss Noe’s arm. “You go get his bottle.”

Reluctantly Miss Noe turned from the window. Bottle, she thought. And her mind went over the countless bottles she had prepared, in times gone by, for her sisters’ babies, for her cousins’ babies. Bottle after bottle had she foraged for. And always the kitchens were the same: dark and damp, with a frayed rug laid before the sink; a dark brown ice chest; and an old chair with its seat worn through and yellowed newspapers laid on it for a cushion; old, faded linoleum—and always the itching fear lest a big black cockroach suddenly dart out and run across the floor.

She wrapped a blue fringed shawl around the baby and made her way with it carefully down the beautiful slippery staircase. Well, *here* was elegance, certainly! Fit for an emperor. Look at that statue, now—a man, all of lovely white marble, stooping down ready to throw something. He had marble curls! She touched them, her heart in her mouth for fear she might do some damage. And those window curtains! Miss Noe felt a little dizzy and sat herself down for a moment in the living room, holding the baby tenderly in her arms, and just looked about her. Yes, the window curtains seemed to be of spun gold. The place was a paradise. Oriental rugs, floor lamps, mahogany furniture, a grand piano holding a vase of pink roses. It was just as she herself would have arranged a house, *if*. . . . Why, just the piano alone, she thought, would be enough for her, if only. . . . She went and stood near it. It was open; the keys were looking at her. Once she had known a little piece, “Amaryllis.” But now perhaps her fingers were a little out of practice. Besides she dared not.

Oh, good gracious—what was that on the little table beside the piano! A dish of chocolate bonbons! She started to reach

out a hand before she thought. It seemed to her she would die if she did not have one of those fat bonbons. But she drew back, shocked and ashamed of herself. Ah, the tempter was everywhere!

She hurried away and through the dining room to the kitchen door. But at the door she hesitated. She heard the squeaking of a rocking chair and the low murmur of someone humming. Ought she to knock? Coughing shyly, she pushed the swinging door open only a few inches and peeped in. A large fat woman with a red face sat knitting. "Excuse me, the baby's bottle," began Miss Noe in a timid voice. "Could you just tell me where the icebox is, and—"

"In front of your nose," said the cook, counting the stitches.

Yes, of course, there it stood. In fact Miss Noe had seen it the minute she opened the door. It was simply tremendous, sky-blue in color, tall as a man. "Oh, isn't it just *beautiful*?" she couldn't help exclaiming.

"Beautiful to keep clean."

"Tsch, tsch, tsch," said Miss Noe, all sympathy. "Indeed, it must be!" She went up to it, touched a handle; feeling guilty, she pulled open one of the doors. She gasped. Inside the compartment rested a whole roast of beef, a platter of vegetable salad molded in gelatine, some cheeses, a bowl of beautiful fruit. The sight made her giddy. "A cup of tea," Mrs. Spahn had said. "Ask the cook." Oh, she must have the tea now, this very minute. Indeed, she couldn't answer for what might happen if she didn't get something at once—just the least little bit of something!

"The bottles are in the left-hand upper," the cook called out sharply. "Nipples over yonder."

Miss Noe really felt dreadfully faint. She had to steady herself against the table, while the bottle was warming. She laid the baby down on the table.

"Ah ah ah! Look what you're doing!" screamed the cook, jumping up. "Don't lay that baby on my nice clean table!" She picked the baby up and rubbed her hand heavily over the place where it had lain. "What'd you bring it down here for, anyways? That's not allowed, you know."

"Not allowed?" asked Miss Noe feebly.

"Oh, no. O-oo-oh, no," said the cook, dragging the word out with a broad wink and a shrug of her shoulders. "Nevah fondle the bebbbeh," she minced, in an attempt at Mrs. Spahn's voice. She shot a listening glance at the door, then stepped close to Miss Noe and gripped her on the arm. "Listen," she whispered, "let me tell you something. There's far too much *fondling* goes on in this house as it is!" She made a wry face, as if she had just chewed on a bitter almond. "Listen to me, I've been everywhere, I've worked at every kind of work human hands can do. But nothing like *this*!" She returned to her rocking chair and took up her knitting again. "But," she added, "so long as you're in my kitchen you're on sweet, clean ground. Understand? It's thoughts I'm speakin' of, if you follow me. There's nothing in the way of dirt or filth gets into my kitchen *that* way!"

"Oh, I'm sure of that," said Miss Noe earnestly. "But I was just wondering. . . ." She now felt afraid that she couldn't climb the stairs again without something in her stomach. "I was just going to ask you—"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," replied the cook, turning her chair a fraction away from Miss Noe to indicate that the conversation was over and done with.

The baby had already begun on his bottle. Miss Noe looked yearningly at the cook for a moment. Her lips opened and she tried to speak. But at last, swallowing a heavy sigh, she carried the baby up again to the nursery and sat down with him in her arms, trying to content herself with the mental image of a cup of tea. It stood out boldly before her, a great white cup and saucer at least a foot high. Oh, the tantalizing steam that rose from it! And suddenly, without warning, there appeared beside the cup a plate of hot buttered toast. But this was more than Miss Noe could bear. She groaned and shut her eyes and tapped her feet on the floor to banish the sight. Now why didn't I speak up to her? she asked herself. I could have said, Miss—or more likely it's Mrs.—if it's not troubling you too much I'd thank you so kindly for a cup of tea. She said I could have a cup of tea, and indeed if I can't have it now it might

be too late. . . . Too meek, she thought angrily. We Noes are too meek for our own good.

The baby, with half-closed eyes, moved his jaw muscles rhythmically and soberly over his milk. His eyes were directed dreamily up toward Miss Noe, who held the bottle for him. With a start, Miss Noe noticed for the first time that the other children were not in the nursery. Ought I go hunt them? she wondered. But it was such a relief to be alone in the room. And holding a baby on her lap always gave her great pleasure. Yet the baby felt so heavy; it seemed to weigh more than she did herself. Her head began to buzz, from faintness. What if she should swoon over and drop this little precious one? Where would her fine job be, then? And they would tell it on her at that agency, and no mother would ever trust her as long as she lived. What? She, Miss Sarah Noe, to drop a helpless baby? Never! She laid her head against the back of the chair and steadied herself. She reviewed her breakfast: a cup of tea, with only the one spoonful of sugar; the last cracker in the box, and the last little dab of peanut butter spread over it—everything always seemed to give out at once. But surely what she had eaten would be sufficient to keep the blood circulating and the faculties clear. A Noe could hold out to the end.

She heard an outburst of laughter, a sharp slap, then the loud voice of the cook. "And I'll see to it your mother gets wind of this, you pigs! You're no better than pigs! You ought to be strapped till the wickedness gets strapped out of your dirty bones!"

The children came clambering up the stairs and into the nursery, drunk with laughter. Rosemary's face was smeared with crumbs and icing. Bruce carried a knife on which was balanced a large piece of white layer cake. Miss Noe's eyes fell upon the cake and clung, dazzled as if by a holy vision.

"Lookiel" called Bruce to Miss Noe, "lookie—for my horse!" He ran with the cake and held it to the horse's jaws. "He likes cake," said Bruce, lifting his eyes to Miss Noe in a frenzy of bliss. "No, no, no," he said, furiously, "my horse can't eat with his old *bit* in his mouth. Take your bit out, you old *horse*."

As Bruce tugged at the leather strap he forgot about the

cake. It lurched and rolled from the knife. Horrified, Miss Noe made a frantic lunge forward to save it—but too late. The cake fell to the floor and collapsed in ruin. “Oh!” cried Miss Noe, fury sweeping over her as her eyes devoured the beautiful white crumbs. “You wicked boy, I—I could—I’ll whip you!” she cried, rushing at him with her hand uplifted for a terrific blow. But when she brought her hand down on his shoulder it was with the feeblest of little pats. “Yes, but if I had the strength,” she told him, with tears in her eyes, “you’d soon see! Miss Noe’s getting a little old, Miss Noe hasn’t had her lunch—”

“Don’t you tell Nana on me!” said Bruce. “Are you gonna tell her? You tell Nana I’m a good boy.”

But Miss Noe couldn’t answer. She crept back to her chair, hugging the baby closely to her heart. Bitter tears of contrition already flowed within her. To have spoken in anger to a little child! To have raised her hand against one of God’s little ones!

Bruce got down on the floor and began to eat the crumbled cake, Rosemary helping him. “Look, this’s for Nana,” he said, finding a good-sized piece of icing. “Look, Rosemary, I’m gonna put this in Nana’s drawer and she’ll find it.” Squealing with delight he ran with it into the other room.

“Nana likes cake,” said Rosemary to Miss Noe. “And I like it, too. Do you like it?”

“Yes,” Miss Noe murmured faintly. “Oh, I do so like cake . . .”

Rosemary began to jump up and down, stamping the cake crumbs into the floor. I ought to put a stop to that, thought Miss Noe, helplessly.

Bruce came over to Miss Noe’s chair, leaned against the arm of it, and ran his hand softly over her black sateen sleeve. “When’s Nana gonna get her baby?” he asked.

“What’s that, my dear?” said Miss Noe feebly.

“Today?” he asked. “Has she gone to get it? Will she bring it back with her?”

“Oh, has Nana a little baby?” asked Miss Noe. But, “She’s been with them ever since they were born,” Mrs. Spahn had said of the nurse. Surely there could be no baby. “No, I think

you're mistaken, dear," Miss Noe said. "This is the only baby your nursie has."

"No, that's my brother, you stupid," said Bruce. "She said she'd like her baby better'n me. Will Nana like it better'n me?"

"No, indeed, she's just joking with you, dear," said Miss Noe, giving him a bright cheery smile. "Nana has no baby at all. Oh, I'm sure of it!"

"Every time when she goes out she says, 'You watch out, Bruce. If you're a bad boy I'll bring my baby back with me.' And she's got its clothes all ready for it, 'cause I know she has."

*Its clothes!* Well, that made quite a difference. If there were clothes—Miss Noe loved baby clothes above everything.

"You come and look," said Bruce, pulling her by the hand. He took her into the other room, where he and Rosemary, laboring together, pulled out the big bottom drawer of Nana's bureau. "Now, see?"

"Well, upon my *word!*" cried Miss Noe. The drawer was packed with new, neatly folded infant clothes. All hand-made, it would seem, too. Little dresses with sleeves no bigger than a doll's arm, cream-colored petticoats, a bonnet that you could wear on your clenched hand. Miss Noe dropped down before the drawer, her face alight, her hands aching to move about among the little garments. She longed to take out every article, examine it, fondle it, smell the fresh sweetness of the material.

"And here's her knittin'," said Bruce. "She's knittin' something." He reached slyly into the wastebasket beside the bureau, removed an upper coating of paper trash, and brought out a little blue worsted cloak, finished all but one sleeve.

"Ah!" Miss Noe caught up the cloak to her cheek.

"She hides it," said Bruce, "so's I won't get it and pull out the stitches, like I did to it once."

"Oh, so sweet," murmured Miss Noe, caressing the cloak, "so lovely!"

"Hey, shut the drawer now," said Bruce. "If she catches us at it she'll give me a beating."

"And is this Nana?" Miss Noe asked, pointing to a snapshot sticking in a corner of the looking glass.

"Yes," said Bruce. Miss Noe took the picture reverently in her hand. "Nana's got on her bathing suit," said Bruce. He scowled and pointed to a figure in the background. "That there's Harry," he added. "Harry's bad. He kisses Nana. I'm gonna put a ghost in Harry's bed, and when he puts out the light and gets in bed he'll find it."

And so this Harry, figured Miss Noe to herself, must be the young husband. A tall, manly looking young fellow he was, too. Nana herself had a very sweet face. Soon now they'll be setting up their own little nest; when a little one comes, thought Miss Noe, wagging her head, then must come the little home. She jumped up and took the baby in her arms again, viewing it with renewed interest and awe. A darling little baby! The power of God, she thought, that's what a baby stands for.

But all of a sudden Miss Noe felt so queer and lightheaded that she thought she was going to topple over. "Oh, mercy," she moaned. She hurriedly laid the baby down in his crib.

"Do you want to pet my horse?" asked Bruce. "I'll let you."

"Oh, no, no." Miss Noe gesticulated weakly with her hands as if to ward off a swarm of angry bees. "You'll have to excuse. . . ."

She made her way unsteadily out to the hall and down the stairs, clinging dizzily to the banister. Somehow, half blindly, she got across the long stretch of floor space to the kitchen. "Tea," she gasped out, flinging open the kitchen door and holding onto the doorknobs with both hands. "*Tea!*"

"Wait now, dearie. Smell this." The cook drew a phial from her bosom. "Aromatic spirits—*here*."

Miss Noe took a long sniff. Overpowering, the odor was. She closed her eyes. When she opened them again she found she was lying on the floor and the cook was fanning her with a paper bag.

"Now, now," the cook said, "that's more like it. Take another whiff. Aromatic spirits. I'm never without it, dearie. Look, here's where I keep it—in my bosom. It's woman's best friend. Tight-corked, see? And in she slips, just inside my corset."

"I thank you," said Miss Noe. "I felt a little faint."

"That's all right, dear. I was matron at the reformatory for

six years, and believe you me, I know the look when a woman's going to keel over. It comes sudden—it's come to myself more times than I've got fingers and toes. Ever since my first husband passed away. . . . Now here's your drop of tea. Draw up to it, here, and take it while it's hot." She pulled the rocking chair up to the table and assisted Miss Noe into it.

The first sip of tea burned Miss Noe's tongue, but it rolled down her throat like warm life itself. "I just felt a little faint," she said apologetically. "They told me at the agency I'd best make haste, and I took the first street car. But little did I think I'd stay the afternoon here. I came off without my lunch, you see—"

"No *lunch*!" cried the cook in horror. "Why didn't you tell Nettie? And you just a bag of bones, to boot! Wait just. . . ." She went to the icebox and brought out the big roast of beef. "You'll never go hungry in *Nettie's* kitchen, so help me," she said. Miss Noe lay weakly back in her chair and watched the plump hands slicing bread and meat, heard the crackle of lettuce, and caught the glint of celery. *Celery*—at twenty-two cents the bunch! Oh, glory to God! She was shocked to realize that she had begun her tea without saying grace.

"And here's to be your *dessert*," the cook announced, flouncing into the pantry and back with a high, covered plate. "What's left of it, that is, after those dirty pigs got done trampling in it." She took off the covering napkin.

"*Oh!*" gasped Miss Noe, her knees shaking giddily under the table. It was the cake!

"St. Valentine's party here, last night," said Nettie, indicating the dining room with a curt nod. "Cake with hearts on it, and Cupees and all—and *him* sittin' there with a straight face. "To my lifetime sweetheart!" he says, lifting up his glass. *I* heard him. And they all up and drank. Then he reaches over and kisses the Missus. And her all smiles and pretty speeches. Poot! The nursemaid seven-month gone already—it's enough to turn your stomach."

"The nursemaid," said Miss Noe, looking up with pleasure from her sandwich. "Yes, I saw her layette of lovely little clothes. The boy showed it me. What a splendid little needle-

woman! Fancy work on the yokes—and she's crocheting the sweetest little cloak."

"Um," growled the cook. "Better do *something* sweet—to wipe out all the sour she's got against her conscience. In two months, I tell you, she'll—and I ask you, why don't the Missus send the girl packing? Because she dassent, that's the answer! Oh, a pretty house, this. A nice house to work in! When that girl comes in my kitchen I fold my lips together like this—see me? And I say my prayers. *She* knows what I'm doin' as well as if I spoke aloud. 'Don't you pray for me, I want none o' your prayers,' she calls out. Oh, she's got an evil tongue in her head, that Nana."

A vague uneasiness had begun to enter Miss Noe's mind. "But surely you don't mean to tell me that Nana's not. . . ." She could hardly bring herself to form the words. She took a sip of tea. "Isn't she *married*, you mean?" she asked in a shamed voice. "Isn't she married to the one they call Harry?"

"To *Harry*?" screamed the cook, immediately clapping her hand on her mouth to stifle her words. She tiptoed to the swinging door and inched it open, her eye to the crack. With a terrific sigh of relief she let it fly to again. "Oh, this house!" she cried. "It puts me in mind of the penitentiary. Ears everywhere! And where there's no ears, there's eyes! Let me tell you something, dearie," she whispered, coming back to Miss Noe's chair. "Believe you me, this Harry's not wasting any of his precious time on the *nursemaid*!" She winked. "Get me?"

Miss Noe put down her cup. "No!" she said emphatically, her cheeks burning. "I took it they were married. And I thought how nice—a little baby coming, and all, and how they'd soon be in a cozy little home of their own, just the three of them, and. . . ." Her voice failed her. She began to cry quietly. "Oh, this is such a *dreadful* world, Mrs. . . . It's such a—it's an awful thing to be all alone in this wicked world, to have nobody—"

"Eat your snack up now, dearie," said the cook, patting her on the shoulder. "It don't pay to take too long at the eating. You never know. . . . Are you ready for your cake, yet?" She took up a long, sharp knife and held it in air while she studied the icing. "Let's see, now. Do you want a piece with a bow and

arrow atop, or a Cupee? No—see here, here's the very piece for yourself!" She sliced off a great, beautiful wedge. "Look, it's got a pretty little red heart on it, see? The last heart left, too." She chuckled.

"Oh, such a piece!" Miss Noe clasped her hands. "Such a piece," she repeated.

"Look, sister," said the cook, "maybe you'll take it home with you to eat it, eh?" She looked nervously at the door. "Yes, that's best. That's always *my* way. Have you got a pocket to your coat or a big handbag or something—so as to carry it out covered, like?" She took down a piece of waxed paper and a paper bag. "No," she continued, lowering her voice, "you won't find Mr. Harry wasting hisself on the likes of that Nana, oh, no. He's after richer bait—savvy? *Richer* bait! 'Oh, nevah fondle th' bebbel'" she said, rolling her eyes. "Don't tell me different! Harry keeps the Missus posted. Never a thing goes on twixt the other couple that the showfer don't run with it to the Missus—they're in cahoots, as you might say. See what I mean?" She brought her face so close to Miss Noe that all Miss Noe could see was the eyes, or rather one big, terrifying eye which seemed to press down on her, as if it held within it all the combined sin and wretchedness of the world.

"Yes, yes—I see," said Miss Noe, frightened. She swallowed down the last of her tea. Yet she didn't see. Or rather, she *hoped* she didn't see.

But oh, what a strange, miserable feeling had entered into her heart. She took the wrapped parcel thankfully and went to stow it away in her coat pocket.

Yet somehow as soon as she heard the kitchen door swing to behind her, her spirits began to rise again. She looked around her at the beautiful living room, at the piano. She leaned down and smelled one of the lovely pink roses. "Oh, pshaw!" she said to herself, making a little pouting expression toward the kitchen. "I don't believe one single solitary word of all that nonsense, so I don't."

She opened the cloak closet to put her cake away in a pocket of her coat. But first she had to undo the package and take one more peek. "O my dear, my very dear heavenly Father," she

whispered rapturously, "I do thank Thee, that Thou hast seen fit . . ." Oh, tonight! Tonight, before she got ready for bed, she would call down and invite Mrs. Broderick to come up. And after Mrs. Broderick had come in and they had the door shut, she would open the cake! How Mrs. B.'s eyes would pop out of her head! And the two of them would devour it, just like two girls at boarding school. Oh, the blessed, blessed cake. And to think that it had a darling little red heart on it, too!

Of course, there was a big arrow stuck right straight through the heart. The cook hadn't seemed to notice that. But what of it? That always went with the heart. There was all the grand fun and such, in life, and the Saviour's love—and then there was always that other thing, too. Best forget it.

# *Young Man in an Astrakhan Cap*

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*by* EDITA MORRIS

**A**S FAR back as Lotta can remember she has studied hard, rested little, and eaten poorly. She sewed on her first button at the age of three, and at six could read, write, and add with fair accuracy. It was none too early, there was not a moment to be lost, for on her broad brow, Mother, with a firm and unwavering hand, had written the word—Career.

Neither Lotta nor her sisters have genius, nor even pronounced talents, but Mother has turned on them the fury of a sonless widow's thwarted ambition. Their various capacities, which in a milder climate probably would have dissolved and gently disappeared, are kept painfully alive in the wintry altitude where Mother dwells.

And so when the Christmas holidays arrive, the sisters are white, their tall bodies stoop, their waists are thin as bees' waists. But Mother, who foresees everything, has foreseen this also, and she has written her country relatives well in advance. So on the eve of the holidays she sends off her daughters to the station where they are to take their respective trains. "Good-by," she says, "mind you eat a lot!" as she waves after the receding taxicab.

At the Central Station a group of hunched-up, ghostly figures shuffle about with their frozen fingers in their mouths, stamping, stamping, to keep their toes from freezing likewise. The incoming trains are frosted over like bridal cakes, and the windows of the compartments are covered with ice flowers. Not a face, not a sign of life, is to be seen behind those panes; when the locomotive whistles, everyone shudders.

In Lotta's train, the third-class compartments are rapidly filling up. She finds a seat in the last car, by the door. It already smells heavy in there, but she is immune to odors. She can refrain from breathing through her nose for almost any length of time; she learned to do so in the stuffy atmosphere of the evening classrooms where she goes to learn journalism and shorthand. How to remain immune to unpleasant smells, and to everything else unpleasant, she is teaching herself quietly, without telling a soul.

Up by the window a man in a round black hat is sitting with a small boy in his lap. Holding the boy with one arm, he stretches the other backward and upward to pull down a canvas hold-all from the rack. He settles it on his unoccupied knee and begins to fumble inside, while the boy from beneath his fringe of wheat-colored hair stares into the bowels of the hold-all, where familiar things, like his cake of soap or his nightshirt, have become strange and absorbing objects.

The man finds a little green bag of lemon drops, extracts one sweet for the boy and one for himself, then gravely hands round the bag in the compartment, offering it to the four other passengers on his own bench and to the five on the bench opposite. They all accept, say thanks with much dignity, and sit sucking silently, their eyes round and completely still, their lips pursed in an identical way because of the acid taste of the drops.

Lotta feels a shiver run down her spine as she watches them and as her own tongue presses the candy to her palate. She decides that she will, quietly and unobtrusively, get rid of it, for she has also taught herself to get rid of a good many things quietly and unobtrusively. A moment later, raising her handkerchief to her nose, she makes a quick dab at her mouth. Relieved of the sweet, she settles down to a day's thinking in the silent compartment, where nothing but a mumbled "Excuse me" or a "Thank you" is heard the whole day long.

The train is five hours behind schedule. All along the line local snowstorms have impeded its progress, but at midnight, singing loudly on the frozen rails, the train runs into the town

of Sala. For the last hour almost everyone in the third-class coach has been lighting matches and heating pennies to thaw peep holes in the window panes, for they are anxious to find those waiting for them on the platform; they are not used to traveling and are nervous. Lotta, her peep holes higher than the others because she is taller, spots Aunt Irma and Uncle Viktor immediately, and holding her suitcase high above her head, manages, thin as she is, to worm her way through the thronged corridor so as to reach the platform first.

"That can't be Lotta! I won't allow it! Viktor, she looks almost grown up!"

Her aunt is holding her tightly clasped to her violet-scented coat, and in that warm, perfumed atmosphere Lotta forgets the note of—well, it sounded almost like terror!—that she had detected in Aunt Irma's voice. Yes, she knows that she is very tall, and her skin is clearer and softer, more like that of a real woman, now that she has passed the age of puberty; it is less embarrassing to look people in the face. In the taxi Aunt Irma says, "Thank goodness that you haven't put your hair up yet and still wear it loose and long. At least something of the child remains!" And she pinches, perhaps playfully, Lotta's cheek. Uncle Viktor, too, looks at Lotta's hair, then settles his gentle glance elsewhere.

The taxi stops at the side entrance of the town hall, which is likewise her aunt's and uncle's residence, and the policeman on duty, Constable Erlandson of the cat whiskers and the Charlie Chaplin feet, salutes Uncle Viktor, the Mayor, then says, "Why, you could knock me over with a feather! To think that this is really Miss Lotta!" He salutes her too, and gives his mustache a twist, while Lotta ponders on the strange fact that of late men, young and old men, invariably do something to their ties or their mustaches when she approaches, though only a year ago they brushed past her as if she did not exist.

"Come along in, Lotta!" Aunt Irma says. "Don't stand there mooning."

The door clicks to behind them, leaving the night to die death upon death in the fists of the midwinter cold. The exquisite warmth and comfort which is the keynote of Aunt Irma's

house, wraps itself around Lotta like an eiderdown; with a little wriggling movement of the shoulders she snuggles into it, and Aunt Irma's eyes and hers meet in a deep understanding smile.

For Aunt Irma knows that nobody is as appreciative of her skill in creating an atmosphere as Lotta; she savors the homage of one whom she feels to be as apt as herself in the art of living. Arm in arm they mount the carpeted stairs, stop before the potted palm, growing huge and happy in the eternal summer weather of this house, and finally stand smiling by the dining-room table, above which the swinging glass lamp throws its glittering light over the multicolored hors d'oeuvres, over the side dishes, sizzling on spirit lamps, over the decanters of schnapps and wine.

"Child, you are as pale as a white-washed wall! You are as thin as an anchovy!" Aunt Irma says as they take their places, and Lotta does not answer. What is there to say?

At Aunt Irma's word, dishes now begin to march up to Lotta like soldiers on review, stop before her a moment, then march on, leaving her plate heaped with pickled herring, jellied grouse, and those famous little white mushrooms bubbling in cream.

At last Lotta sits back, her face burning, her forehead moist, and she says that she can't eat any more-tonight.

"Those lovely mushrooms!" she sighs.

"Yes, they were lovely," Aunt Irma says. "But now, Lotta, you must tell us about everything at home. How is Gudrun's music? Did she get her diploma? And Betta's law work? We hear that you're a budding journalist and doing shorthand after school hours! It's really wonderful the way your mother has set you all marching toward careers! Nothing is more wonderful for a woman than a career. Nothing! Am I right, Viktor?"

"Yes, Irma dear," Uncle Viktor says, and his eyes wander gently from the violet bouquet on Aunt Irma's lace blouse to her expensively waved hair. Then he lowers his eyelids and his gaze remains fixed on the tablecloth. Is it Lotta's imagination that the corners of his mouth move upward in the subtlest of smiles?

Lotta has been five days in Sala. She has slept fourteen hours every night and eaten so prodigiously that at the end of every meal old Bina, the cook, pops her head through the kitchen door just to look at her! A great many people look at Lotta nowadays, though not for the same reason. Back home in the capital, when she hurried, pale and shivering, between her school and her shorthand classes, few eyes noticed her long shining hair and her long quick legs; here, with her back straightened from rest, her face filling in, every eye seems to be nibbling at her. "Have I a smudge on my nose, Aunt Irma?" Lotta says. "No," answers Aunt Irma and walks quicker. Next day Aunt Irma tells her, "I don't feel like a walk today. I think we'll stay indoors instead of going out." As they sit reading in front of the fire, Lotta looks up at Aunt Irma from time to time, trying to puzzle something out, though just what it is she doesn't yet know.

Next afternoon, after buying Aunt Irma's violets in the flower shop, they are walking down Klara Street when somebody calls to them. "Oh, Aunt Irma," says Lotta, "it's Assessor Haan!" They stop and wait for him. The Assessor, Aunt Irma's life-long admirer, approaches smiling, his tall astrakhan cap set at a becoming angle. He greets them, his large liquid eyes brimming over with unsaid compliments, then takes the two women by the arm and leads them up to the nearest street lamp.

"Stand back to back," he commands. "Yes, exactly the same height! Little Lotta! I can't believe it." And again he puts one hand through Aunt Irma's arm, the other through Lotta's, and as they walk homeward through the pitch-black town, he tells them that he had followed them from the flower shop for quite a way, absolutely convinced that he was seeing double. "For I knew that there was only one perfect figure in the whole world, and that was Irma's, but now there was an exact replica of it by her side!" Aunt Irma laughs, though only very little, and says quickly, "Lotta, child, why don't you run down to the pastry shop and buy some good things for your tea?" Then she turns to the Assessor and says, "Lotta is a serious young thing. She has a career in front of her and now she must only

think of eating and resting and keeping up her strength. Besides," Lotta hears her say to the Assessor as they walk off together, "children are so crazy about sweet things!"

But Lotta stands on the street corner and gazes after her aunt. She looks sharply at Aunt Irma's figure, which she can see in profile as the couple cross the street. A perfect figure, is it? The legs are elegant, certainly, and so is the sweeping line of the back. The bosom is big, almost too big, but perhaps that's the very reason that her figure is thrilling—because there's such a marked contrast between the bosom and the long thin hips! And her own is an exact replica of it? How idiotic! Still for some reason she draws a deep breath. Something is beginning to take shape in her mind; soon it will come to the surface. She never tries to probe into her unconscious, but one day a decision presents itself, neat and clear, and then she acts on it.

She remembers the cakes. A tiny smile, which she neither could nor would explain, creeps into her face as she walks down the icy black street to the pastry shop, stepping with both her feet into the rectangle of light flung on to the pavement through the pastry shop window. Rows of éclairs, nestling under their coats of chocolate, lie squeezing each other on wooden trays. Simply hundreds of éclairs—and Aunt Irma could afford to buy every one of them if she wanted to. Just like that! She, Lotta, can buy one or two, because such is Aunt Irma's wish. If it weren't for Aunt Irma, she couldn't buy one éclair, couldn't buy *anything!* In all probability she will never in her life be able to buy luxuries, because every penny she earns snooping up news for some paper will go to keep her thin body and her harassed soul together. But Aunt Irma has no career! That's why she can buy as many éclairs as she can swallow and violets by the ton, if she so desires! To say nothing of mile upon mile of wave for her hair. Lotta says, "Hmm," as she steps into the shop.

The kitchen stove and Bina are soothing company, Lotta finds. Particularly these holidays she thinks that the unmovable stove and the unmovable Bina are splendid. At home she, like her sisters, is a mere mechanical toy to which Mother has the

key; in Aunt Irma's house she doesn't feel that she is being wound up every morning, but she is harassed none the less. Her aunt's company, however delicious, has the effect on her of a persistent tickling, nerve-racking and subtle, from which she has to escape at times.

Lotta feels unsettled these days; there is concern on her forehead. One moment she is fretting about losing her speed at shorthand during this lazy period; later, after fashioning hieroglyphics and arabesques for hours, she suddenly makes a dash for Aunt Irma's dressing table to smash handfuls of violet cream into her cheeks, or to tie a ribbon in her hair. But a little later again both occupations pall, and she only wants to sit by the warm placid kitchen stove, by the warm placid Bina, and rest. Bina doesn't care about careers, she never converses subtly, but confines herself to stating facts.

"It's cold, Lotta," she says. "The wolves are on their way down to eat up the town." Or, "This meat is as tender as little children's rumps" (smacking with her powerful paw the side of a bloody joint). And Lotta, squeezing herself into the cranny between the stove and cupboard, squats on the coal sack and watches the snow fall on the balcony outside. "Yes, Bina," she says. "Yes." And she sighs with relief.

Then Bina hands her a huge cup of coffee with a dash of rum in it, saying, "Mind—it's hot, Lotta." Whereupon Lotta again sighs in contentment. But before long she begins to think, a cursed habit that she has been taught by irresponsible people. "There are many kinds of lives," she thinks. "Lives like Bina's—lives like those that Mother is preparing for us. Then there is Aunt Irma's kind of life. There are all sorts, and if one could only choose the one one wanted! But perhaps one can! Yes, perhaps one can." At this point Lotta's cup goes clattering back onto its saucer; she feels like getting up, like moving.

"I'm going out on the balcony, Bina."

"Yes," Bina says. "Do. It's Saturday today. Do you remember how you used to hang over the balcony railing every Saturday about this time and watch the drunks being taken from the Black Maria to jail? My, how you used to laugh, Lotta!"

On the balcony a deer, covered over with a fine powdering

of snow, hangs from its hind legs; the green pine twigs protruding from its disboweled interior, smell wildly of forest. Lotta stands beside it, happily drawing a forefinger over its long dead teeth.

From the balcony she can see the county jail, and the door leading to the cellar where they throw the Saturday drunks. While she is standing there, she hears the rumbling of heavy wheels on the cobblestones, and the Black Maria drives into the yard. Constable Erlandson, his feet turning outward like the feet of a duck, hurries forward to open the door.

Lotta hears a howl from the padded interior. Erlandson and the driver seize the first drunk by the legs, hoist him up between them, and toss him down into the cellar. The other drunks howl with laughter as he goes slithering down the stairs and reaches the bottom with a thud.

It is terribly funny. Lotta is just about to laugh.

The second drunk is young, with dangling, sausagelike legs that cross like scissor blades when he tries to stand on them. Erlandson drops him in the snow and lets him lie there, mumbling, till the others are disposed of, when he too gets a kick in the behind and shoots down into the cellar. The van goes clattering off on its next trip.

She stands there without moving. No, this isn't funny—it definitely isn't funny. Hm—that's queer! It seems that one day a thing just isn't funny any more. Will other things besides watching drunks popped head-first into jail cease being funny? What is she to laugh at then? Well, she'll no longer be herself, but someone else, by that time. What she laughs at will depend on who she turns out to be.

Oh, she is back at that again—right back where she was in the kitchen! She doesn't know what she means anyhow, it is all so confusing. How those drunken men do yell! She feels a pat of snow lying on the top of her head. What an annoying kind of place a balcony is, neither properly out-of-doors, nor inside the house! A kind of in-between place. Yes—in-between. Hateful.

She swings about sharply, gives the hanging deer a slap

with her hand, hurries past Bina and past the stove, opens the door to the dining room, opens another door, doesn't know where to go next. . . .

Does Assessor Haan know the exact hour that Lotta goes skating on the Sala River? Or is it by chance that just as she comes shooting out of the narrow, pipelike stretch of the river and begins to swoop and swirl, cutting figures on its broader reaches, the Assessor is always standing on the shore? Every day for a week now his tall astrakhan cap has been making a dark patch against the snow-covered trees, and Lotta has waved to him and danced about on the ice until she hasn't a breath of air left in her. Then at last she has skated toward him slowly, smiling at him, in Aunt Irma's long, close-fitting coat.

"I'm standing here dreaming that I'm young!" he tells her as she skates up to him, her fair hair like a sail behind her.

"Yes, this is Aunt Irma's coat," she says, attributing his words and the trembling of his fingers as he undoes her skates to his memories of her aunt.

"Two eyes—two skies," he says. "A northern woman, an eternally white night, an eternal longing."

He's dreaming of Aunt Irma, thinks Lotta as they walk homeward, his hand in her arm. And she laughs.

"Yes, yes, laugh away," he tells her. "Laugh the low golden laughter of all lovely women."

Lotta laughs again.

"I must hurry, Assessor Haan," she says. "Aunt Irma hates to be kept waiting."

They walk on, the Assessor silent except for a little sigh now and then, and presently they come opposite the house.

"Oh, look, Assessor Haan!" says Lotta. "There is Aunt Irma at the window, near the palm. Do you see her? She's looking at us."

But what is this? The Assessor is off without even a good-by, pulling his hand from her arm, thrusting her skates at her. He is dashing down a side street as quickly as he can go. Lotta

stands staring after him, then she pulls open the front door and chases up the stairs, the skates in her hand knocking against each other so that the steel sings.

"Aunt Irma!" she calls out and then louder: "Aunt Irma, darling!" But the figure by the window, back turned squarely to the room, is mute. Lotta lays a cheek alongside Aunt Irma's, weaves an arm through hers. "Oh, what is it, Aunt Irma? What is it?" she says, for her aunt's arm is icy, stiff as a bough on a tree. Slowly, very slowly, that arm sinks down, falls straight down, shedding the hand that nestles in it. And now at last Aunt Irma turns her face, her eyes matching in hardness the steel of Lotta's skates. She looks at Lotta and then she leaves the room.

Above Lotta's head the town hall crashes; beams, bricks, and mortar come tumbling about her. When the thunder of that crash dies away, she opens her eyes wide and looks about her. Now she sees for the first time. So that was it! Aunt Irma is . . . jealous! Jealous of her. Aunt Irma is in a rage because she saw Lotta and the Assessor walking arm in arm. Is it possible? Why should Aunt Irma, "the loveliest woman in the country," feel scared of Lotta, and what does her jealousy prove? What has Aunt Irma just told her with an eloquence which would put the most flowery speech to shame? Simply that she, Lotta, is still more beautiful, more alarmingly beautiful, than Aunt Irma; that the Assessor's compliments were inspired by her, not by his memories of Aunt Irma; that those eyes staring at her in the streets had discovered something which she had never discovered about herself, busy as she had been scrambling toward a goal of Mother's choosing. Lotta sits down on a chair, as weak as if she had been drained of a whole pint of blood.

But she feels that she is smiling, smiling wickedly, deep inside. She can't help it. She closes her eyes hard and when she opens them, colors are blurred from her having pressed her eyelids so tightly together; the funniest things happen to the pattern in the Persian carpet; the stilted, angular figures take on familiar shapes, and two of them which seem to be stand-

ing on their heads, look exactly—yes, exactly—like Mother and Aunt Irma.

Lotta rises and walks over them into the next room.

At two o'clock the winter day is over, the room goes black. Lotta, who has been lying face down on the sofa, thinking, jumps up and goes over to the window. She stands there looking into the square, stacked high with snow, with pigeons flying above it, people scurrying across. Lotta follows each one till a tram cuts him from view or till he vanishes into the mouth of a side street, though it is only at the women that she really looks. The women, the busy women, hastening between office and home with bleak faces, lines running deep from nose to mouth! In their eyes is an expression as if they were forever listening to the wailing of their harassed souls. Snow is coming down, thick and wet, but they must all be out. Oh, Lotta knows that story well enough! This very minute her sister Gudrun is probably tramping through the slush of the capital, clutching beneath her arm the coffin with the dead violin which Mother has promised will one day come alive and sing. In two days her own holidays will be over, in two days she too. . . .

She drops the curtain and turns to peer into the room, which seems to whisper behind her in the silence. The logs are breaking and turning over in the round china stove; a small bouquet of violets breathes hard in the dark. This is Aunt Irma's home! Aunt Irma of the lazy fingers, of the perfect figure!

Lotta turns on the light and stands before the mirror, which so often must have received Aunt Irma's image. For the first time she sees herself properly, that is, with the eyes of others; she has grown consciously beautiful; her eyes are intense, light.

Thank you, Assessor Haan! she says. Thank you, Aunt Irma!

And it is at that moment that she changes the career Mother has chosen for her for the one Aunt Irma and the Assessor have pointed out. The uncertainty of the last week falls to her feet.

I'm sorry, Mother, she says.

Then she switches off the light and goes back to the window. The pigeons, their feathers on end, are still riding round and round on the wind. The door of the flower shop across the

square is torn open—is it by the force of the wind? No, Lotta sees that it is the assistant, Miss Bolin, with the uneven legs, one long, one short, who has opened the door and who now comes bustling out, her arms full of flowers in glazed paper bags. Oh, heavens! She has tripped! She is falling in the slush. Lotta presses her face against the pane. Oh, poor Miss Bolin! Now she is kneeling on the pavement, gathering up the soiled parcels, looking up, terrified, at the brilliantly lit hairdresser's behind her, the door of which has just swung open. Someone is leaving the shop; Miss Bolin limps away like a hurt rabbit.

But isn't that. . . . Yes, it is Aunt Irma's friend, Mrs. Klas, who has come out from the coiffeur's. Lotta hopes fervently that Mrs. Klas didn't see Miss Bolin lying in the slush. A hairdresser's assistant, hand under Mrs. Klas's arm, is escorting her down the slippery steps to her car. She won't fall—not she! Isn't that unfair? Big, pink, fat Mrs. Klas with her two legs both the same length! Yes, unfair it is! Wrong! And yet a minute ago she, Lotta, had decided to throw over her career and to become like Mrs. Klas, like Aunt Irma. Had she really? Suddenly Miss Bolin, the hurrying women in the square, her own sisters, all seem wonderful compared to ladies like Mrs. Klas, smug in their layers of elegant fat upon which the skin lies ceaseless. Lotta's forehead draws together; she has a moment of wild hesitation.

Though she is still standing at the window, she no longer sees anything outside; she is living within herself, is thinking hard. Her anger is rising against her mother, against Aunt Irma, against all these people and all those before them who haven't done a scrap to change things in the world, so that it is still a shame for a woman to be shabby and scraggy and hard-working. The whole world is like this square before her, with Miss Bolins falling over and Mrs. Klases being ushered into their fine cars. Beastly!

"I'm not going to fall in the slush—not on your life," she says, and she hears herself give one quick unhappy sob.

Next morning the station platform is alive with people who laugh and talk, their voices overpowered by the hooting and

clanging of freight trains changing position down the line. But it is the big express that Sala is waiting for, the eagle which has flown down from the far white north, winging its way further and further south till this evening it will swoop into the capital. Lotta with her suitcase, Aunt Irma, and Uncle Viktor are soon hemmed in by a ring of acquaintances.

Lotta stands a little to one side. She is enjoying herself, is smiling at a joke of her own. Aunt Irma's long, tight-fitting coat, lent her for her stay in Sala in order to raise her to its owner's standard, has returned to its wardrobe; Cinderella, back in her old rags, is sharing a secret with the buffet mirror across the platform. That mirror, with the bland face of truth, is telling her that her mackintosh, which stops dead below her knees and yawns above her bosom, makes of her beauty something startling, incredible. The old gentlemen around Aunt Irma have begun to hem and to haw, to pretend that they are looking for something, to rub their hands together, and all at once they are by Lotta's side, fiddling with their ties and twirling their mustaches so violently that their ladies break into panic, and set in dabbing powder on their needle-sharp beaks and twittering like birds in an aviary.

Uncle Viktor has walked off and he is standing a few yards away, staring holes into his boots. Lotta gets red as a plum; she is seized with a quiet, grown-up indignation. Why won't Uncle Viktor look at her? What is the matter with him, anyway? Of course Uncle Viktor never speaks, but Lotta knows that his eyes have been open during these holidays. Is he chagrined because Lotta might turn deserter to her cause?

Well, all right, let him be! Uncle Viktor has had fifty years to re-make the world, to settle matters so that Miss Bolin and her kind should not remain forever slaves, and Aunt Irma and her kind queens. But what has he done, except marry the loveliest and the laziest of them all, the way every man has tried to do, and will always try to do. Oh, she could shake them all! She could weep with rage!

Standing there, staring at his silly boots! No wonder that the world is in the state it's in, she says behind her teeth.

"Lost in thought, Lotta?"

"Oh, yes, our Lotta has already left us," says Aunt Irma with a fluty little laugh. "She's far away, writing imaginary newspaper articles. Lotta is a serious young thing. All she thinks of is her career, isn't it, Lotta?"

"Yes, Aunt Irma," Lotta says, "that's all I think of."

And suddenly she looks straight into Aunt Irma's eyes and gives her a smile that should not have been ready for another ten years at least. It is Aunt Irma who turns her eyes away.

"There's the train!"

"Yes, there it is! It's packed too, isn't it? I only hope you'll get a seat, Lotta."

"I'll get a seat," says Lotta, walking straight-backed across the station platform. The papier-mâché suitcase turns in her hand and seems to wink at the well-dressed crowd, standing looking after her. We'll get a seat, it says.

The train, like an overstuffed caterpillar, is bulging in every section. The luggage racks are sagging, the air hangs heavy as garlands on people's heads. Those lucky ones who have found places sit glassy-eyed and perspiring, for the battle has been grim. Now Lotta has fought her way through six carriages and has even entered the seventh before she sees that it is not third but first class. She is about to retreat when a young man in an astrakhan cap, as tall and curly as the Assessor's, jumps up and stands before her.

"Excuse me. There's a vacant seat in here," he says.

"In there! But it is first class."

"Well—yes," he answers, "but, you see, I can just say a word to the conductor and . . . and. . . ."

Lotta is taken aback; she feels shy. Then she remembers! But is it really as simple as all that?

"Why, thank you," she says to the young man, whose eyes begin to shine. "Thank you most awfully."

The train has found its legs and is running quickly out of Sala, giving the little town a blast of smoke and a shrill whistle as parting gifts. In the open window, flourishing a handkerchief at Aunt Irma, stands Lotta, and beside her is a young man in an astrakhan cap.

## *It Takes All Kinds—*

of women to make the world. Some of them have appeared in the foregoing pages. But women of other ages, with different preoccupations from those that can be grouped according to subject matter, must not be omitted, even if they can be listed only chronologically:

Maritta Wolff's "Love Child" is the female barbarian at an early stage of development. She was lifted from that remarkable first novel, *Whistle Stop*, which won the Avery Hopwood fiction award for 1940.

"Like a Field Mouse Over the Heart" is the awakening of sexuality, the desperate need in the girl child for attachment, the relation, perplexed and troubling, of sister to sister. The story's theme is one of those that keep "lurking and bothering at the back of one's consciousness," Elizabeth Eastman says, "but I could not settle on the actual form until I decided to fit it into my own childhood's background."

Victoria Lincoln's nymph is one of this moment's American adolescents, in fact, the author's own daughter. That she has not yet sued her mother for libel is a matter of congratulation in the Lincoln family, where pest suits have become customary since the sensational success of *February Hill*.

"The Hepburn Girls" is another documentary study, this time of the American woman's college-career tradition. Lenore Cotten knows the Hepburns both in the East, where she was for a time on the staff of *Harper's Bazaar*, and in Hollywood, as the wife of the town's rising star, Joseph Cotten.

"Ghostly Father, I Confess" is a detailed analysis (on a psychoanalytic couch) of some of the processes by which one woman arrived at the muddle most American women seem to find themselves in as they approach the dividing line of thirty-five. It is the closing section of *The Company She Keeps*, the book which made Mary McCarthy the center of a storm of literary controversy.

“Caput Mortuum” pictures the oldest, at times the gayest, method of escape from the age-old problems to which our mothers had to improvise solutions. It is the story which catapulted Edita Morris into the front rank of contemporary women writers.

Dorothy Parker always tells more than it's fair to know about one's fellow women. But in “Horsie” she treats with the penetration of the understanding heart one of Mother Nature's crudest wastes—unfulfilled female middle age.

Finally, “The Will” is about two kinds of aging woman—the kind that becomes frozen in her own bitter immaturity and the kind that carries through life a child-like responsiveness that has come to be thought of as femininity.

# Love Child

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by MARITTA WOLFF

MARY VEECH'S daughter lay on her stomach in the grass that grew tall where the old streetcar tracks had been taken up, now that bus service was assured the village. She peeped up out of the tangle of grass and weeds, well hidden, at the panorama of back yards, garden plots, and billowing clotheslines. The sun shone down hot on her body through her thin cotton dress. The air was full of muted lethargic sound: insects, and children's voices, automobiles on Main Street, radios. But Dorothy's skinny little body was tense and alert on the ground. Black ants crawled over her bare legs, but she never noticed them. She crawled forward in the grass silently like a little animal. The grass swayed over her as she lay motionless again, and one long green stem of it, straddled by a shiny golden-colored shelled bug, bobbed against her cheek.

Suddenly she got up and darted through an opening in the fence into a neat, well-kept garden plot beyond. Along its edge, the tame asparagus grew in an irregular line. She broke off the thick tender stalks with her wiry fingers, keeping her eyes turned toward the house beyond. She picked until her hands were full, and then she bundled the asparagus into the skirt of her dress and went on picking.

A door slammed somewhere, and as quickly as she had come, she darted back again and sank down into the tall weeds on the other side.

A few moments later Dorothy rapped on the back door of a house down the street and turned a sweet, ingratiating smile on the woman in the apron who came to answer. She held out a scant handful of the asparagus and said in a piping childish

voice, "You want to buy some asparagus? It's only five cents."

The woman smiled back at her through the screen door. "Why, hello there, Dorothy. My, that's nice asparagus. It's real fresh, isn't it? And only a nickel a bunch! I tell you what, I'll take two bunches. How's that?"

"That will be fine." Dorothy smiled all across her face, so that the woman laughed.

"You wait just a minute and I'll get the money for you."

Dorothy sorted out something slightly under two handfuls of the asparagus from her stock and handed it in the door to the woman when she returned.

Her customer dropped the coins into her hand. "There. Here is a dime and two pennies for you."

Dorothy's face turned rosy with appealing delight. "Oh, thank you very much!"

The woman laughed again as the child gathered up her asparagus from the porch. She watched Dorothy out of sight and sighed as she put away the asparagus that she had no use for, thinking sentimentally of what a lovely child that little Veech girl was (but then love children so often were), and how sad it was that the poor little thing would never have a chance to grow up right; no telling if the Veech family was good to her or not. Then, of course, the kind of a mother she had. . . .

As soon as Dorothy turned away from the porch the smile disappeared from her face, leaving it blank and closed and artificial again. She walked carefully with her armful of asparagus, looking from time to time to see that the coins did not spill out of her pocket. She went on to the next house, and to the next, methodically, until she had sold it all. Finally, putting her hand into her pocket over the money, she ran for home.

Once there, she sneaked by her grandfather into the house and straight up the stairs. In the bare hallway, lined with open bedroom doors framing glimpses of untidy, unmade beds, stood an old pasteboard box full of remnants of broken toys, castoffs of the whole Veech family that Dorothy, too, had long ago outgrown. She crouched down beside it, reaching in among the dusty broken clutter. She pulled out a tin box, opened it, and dropped her little handful of money on top of the rest that

she had hidden there. She looked long at her savings, with her face expressionless, and then she hid the box again, down in among the toys.

She stood up and teetered uncertainly on her bare feet, and then slipped into the small bedroom where her mother slept alone. Dorothy herself since babyhood had slept in the cot at the foot of her grandmother and grandfather's bed. This room in which Mary Veech lived the few hours of the day that she spent at home was somehow subtly full of her presence. It was a small sparsely furnished room, with a clothes closet at one end and a window at the other. There was a large wooden bed in the room, and a low dresser, neat and bare, with a mirror hanging over it. The floor lacked rugs and was unpainted. The one touch of luxury was the large padded cretonne-covered easy chair and footrest that stood before the window with a little bare table beside it, to hold an ash tray.

Dorothy hung onto the edge of the dresser, peering at herself in the mirror. She tipped her head this way and that, posing it and studying her own reflection. She stepped back a little, her lips moving as if she were holding a noiseless conversation with someone invisible to the common eye. Her posing became more elaborate and grotesque as half-formed expressions passed across her face. She was now the leading character in some vague but profound and melodramatic tragedy.

At that moment her Aunt Jen entered, barefooted and quiet, clad only in brassière and scant silk step-ins. She stopped short to watch Dorothy in front of the looking glass.

"What you doing in here?" she said, and Dorothy skipped at the sound of her voice. "Go on, get out of here, you ain't got any business fooling around in your mother's room."

Dorothy stared at her silently, motionless.

"Go on!" Jen said again. "Can't you hear me? Maybe nobody else around here makes you mind, but when I say something to you, you're gonna do it."

She advanced on the little girl and tried to push her out of the room. Dorothy stood her ground, struggling and clawing without a sound. They scuffled together. "Why, you little brat, you!" Jen said. She pushed Dorothy out ahead of her and

slammed the door shut behind them with all of her strength. She stalked back to her room at the other end of the hall.

Dorothy padded down to the kitchen where Molly, her grandmother, was washing dishes, and said with her sweetest smile, "Grandma, can I have a nickel to buy an ice-cream cone? It's awful hot. I want an ice-cream cone."

"Why, sure you can." Molly wiped her wet hands on the sides of her dress and went to her purse on top of the cupboard. "Ice cream is the best thing there is for little girls this kind of weather. Here's a nickel. You skip with it, but don't you stay out in that sun too much nor walk too fast."

"O. K.," Dorothy said.

"What you been doing this morning, Dor'thy?"

Dorothy swung on a chair-back and searched her mind. "Ooooooh, playin' with the kids."

"Well, you be careful and stay outa the sun. Today is sure a scorcher. I guess we're in for a pretty hot summer. I'm about bushed when it gets hot like this. I ain't gonna cook no meals today till it gets cooler. Anybody that wants any dinner is gonna have to get it themselves. I'm gonna lay down awhile and see if I can't get cooled off."

Dorothy edged away, out of the sound of her grandmother's voice. She sat down on the top step of the front porch with the old cat on her lap. The cat sprawled across her thin knees on his back, relaxed and unafraid, with the legs sticking out stiffly. Dorothy was preoccupied with exploring his bony ribs and his hip joints with her spidery, sharp little fingers.

"Dor'thy, I wouldn't handle that cat all the time if I was you," Molly said absently. "This hot weather makes him kinda sick and he don't like to be handled, besides he's just covered with fleas." Dorothy sidled off down the street, stepping carefully on the hot cement and squeezing the nickel tight in her sweaty little hand.

Dorothy sat on the top-stair step, hunched over, with the little tin box in her hands, the tin box that had contained her savings and that she had kept hidden away among the box of toys at the head of the stairway. The box was empty. She had

found it empty when she came this morning to put in the nickel her grandmother had given her the day before. She was angry in hot and cold flashes, and she was wise enough to know that she could not complain about her loss to anyone, without giving away the secret of her little hoard. She put the one lone nickel in the bottom of the tin box. She was so angry that she sat there for nearly an hour, holding her breath from time to time until her heart pounded and she felt faint and sick. She suspected each of the family in turn. Most of all she was angry because she could not know for sure which one of them had done it and because she could think of no adequate way of getting even with anybody that did not involve telling her grandmother of the loss.

She got up finally and sneaked downstairs and out of the door, the little tin box hidden in her hands. She went down among the weeds in the back of the garden where she would be all to herself, and sat down. She wanted to writhe on the ground and scream with hatred. She wanted to hurt people, break things to pieces and set things on fire. She sat swaying back and forth with her eyes closed, her mouth wide open, shivering all over. She gripped the tin box so tightly that it cut into her hands.

The bony old cat came ambling up out of the cool weeds, headed in the general direction of the kitchen door. He stared at her out of his oblique, wise, old eyes, then went up to her and rubbed against her bare arm. The touch of his mangy fur startled the little girl and she opened her eyes. A perfect scream of fury came up in her throat, but she did not make a sound. She dropped the tin box on the ground, grabbed the old cat by the neck with both hands, and squeezed with all the strength that she had. The cat struggled for his life, twisting and clawing with his feeble strength. She threw her thin body on top of him, careless of the scratching claws that drew blood along her arms and hands, never releasing her fingers from around his neck. The motion went out of the cat's body finally, leaving it still and limp, but for a long time the child did not release her fingers from his neck.

She let go at last and sat up. She did not look at the cat.

She stared at her tiny, numbed fingers curiously and at the blood running down her arms and hands. She was tired and worn out. The heat seemed oppressive to her. She hid her face on top of her knees awhile, conscious of the stinging pain in her arms and of the ache in her head. She sat up again, and this time she stared at the twisted limp body of the cat beside her on the grass. She took hold of one of his feet experimentally, and then she put her hand along the prominent rib bones where so many times she had felt his feeble old heart pounding.

She stared at the body of the cat for a long time, her face impassive. Some of the blood from her scratches had dried on her arms and hands. A long smear of it along the side of her face and up into her pale hair had dried also. She got up on her knees and peered out through the weeds to the back of the house.

Then, still kneeling, she dug a little shallow pit in the ground with her hand, put the tin box in it, and covered it over again. She picked the tender green tops from a couple of weeds above her, and laid them over the spot where she had hidden the box, crossing them carefully to make an X. Then, looking toward the house again, she furtively crawled through the weeds, dragging the cat's body behind her by his hind legs. By keeping to the weeds of the vacant lot she came out on the sidewalk about a block from the house. She picked up the cat then, carrying the body carelessly over her arm, as she had carried him many times before.

The street was deserted in the heat. There were no cars along the pavement. She crossed the pavement and crawled under the fence to the railroad track. She walked up the track, in the deep grass beside it, until she was directly behind a large billboard that faced the pavement. Securely hidden by the billboard she climbed up the bank onto the railroad track. She looked cautiously in all directions to see that there was no train coming, or anybody watching her. There were three or four tracks together here. She studied them carefully and finally decided on one of the middle ones. She looked again in all directions, and then she squatted down and draped the limp body of the cat directly over the hot shining steel rail. She

arranged the body carefully, the head hanging down inside the rail against the tie. She stood up breathing a deep sigh of relief. The creosote on the ties had melted in the sun, and stuck to her shoes, a black sticky substance. She wiped her shoes carefully in the thick grass and darted back across the pavement onto the sidewalk and ran toward home.

As soon as she came in sight of the house she began to cry. The tears ran out of her eyes and streaked down her dirty face. The crying and the tears were genuine enough. She wept at the top of her voice, her whole body shaking. She ran up the front steps, past her startled grandfather into the house, and straight to Molly in the kitchen.

Molly caught the weeping child in her arms. "For Lord's sakes, what in the world you been doing? Why, child, you're all covered with blood. Did you fall down? Tell Grandma how you got hurt. Here, let me see. Why, something just like to scratched you nearly to pieces. Tell Grandma what happened to you, Dorothy."

She went to the sink and wet a cloth with water and began to wipe the dirt and blood from the child's face and arms.

Over her sobbing Dorothy talked incoherently. "The cat done it. The prettiest black and white cat, and it scratched me something awful. I just picked it up and wanted to pet it. I wasn't going to hurt it, and it scratched me something awful. . . ."

Molly got the turpentine bottle out of the cupboard. "This is gonna smart just a minute, but then it will make you feel all better. There, hold still and let Grandma put it on your arms."

She applied the turpentine liberally, and Dorothy danced and shrieked with the smarting of it, over the kitchen floor. She gathered the weeping child into her arms again, pressing her against her big soft bosom. "There, there, now. Don't cry no more. You'll feel all better in a minute. Next time you see a strange cat don't you pick it up, 'cause some cats is ugly. You just don't want to have nothing to do with 'em. There, don't cry so. Why, I swear to Lord, she's just shaking something awful. There, there, don't cry so. Why, the poor little thing!"

# Like a Field Mouse Over the Heart

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by ELIZABETH EASTMAN

DON'T you remember (sisters, sisters) the way it happened with you? For it has come to every woman, somewhere far behind you is that day when the shielding clouds of a spring's dawning were ripped apart and you had to look, you could not turn away. Alina, not you? Sikri, Esta? Oh, don't you remember at all, when I remember so well. . . .

It was after picking time, with the smell of ripe cranberries filling the world, and the sound of the separator's whirring was loud through the dust and flying dead vines. Hay dripping from old rafters fell on the proud red berries that we, having to look at and touch, could only hate because of our rebellion against screening.

Ma was at the screen's mouth; always she sat there, with one hand making a patient gateway, never relaxing, holding back the thin downward rolling stream of bright red and with her eyes searching for the final flaw. Utterly unmoving she was, on her upended empty box, wearing felt boots on her feet and half-mittens over her hands so that only the stiffened grimy fingers showed; never having time for talking, because she could do only one thing well at a time, and it was so necessary that the berries in the barrel should be free of all the frozen, worm-eaten, and untimely shriveled.

"Are you cold, then, little ones?" she asked, sighing, having to look up in speaking but making her hand at the mouth of the screen compact so that the berries piled up gently against the black cotton mitten.

"Oh, freezing, Mammal!" we cried, stamping our feet as if she were the one who had made it autumn with winter already

creeping along the floor of the ancient barn. "My feet; oh, my hands!"

"Then run around a little," she said, full of sorrow. "After a while it will be dinnertime."

For it was so important to finish the screening, a night of sudden frost could come any time and freeze through the heavy horse blankets and mounded hay over the berry boxes, and that would mean the end of everything, of so very nearly everything that the tiny margin of leeway would not matter. From early spring every day of sunlight and of rain had been pointing to this time, and before that there had been the winter's length of dreaming.

Alina could have understood if she had wanted to, but she did not care, thinking only about those other things that made up the meaning of life for her. Pa stood whirling with all his might at the separator, heaving boxes, pouring, labeling, rushing up the screen to see if the berries were moving at all; and Alina sat on her piled-up boxes in her good green hat and Sunday coat, hands bare, no felts over her shoes, looking around every other minute at the alarm clock on the window sill and then out through the window that showed a piece of wagon road running up to the barn.

"Well, don't fall asleep again, Esmerald," she said suddenly, in terrific sharpness, ready to explode.

And I retorted, "Oh, you look so silly today!" Because, although we were both waiting, waiting on that afternoon, she knew what she was waiting for, while I had no name to give to my weight of expectancy. Bored, I was too dulled and cold to remember longer the exhilaration of running across long yellow grass in midday balm of sunlight with little pine trees jiggling beside me as I sped toward dinner; feeling the standing still of time, in blurred lassitude knowing that other things must still exist, the kittens, my doll Daisy Bell, but with every other reality blotted out by the eternal coldness, the hardness, the everlasting sleek round redness of cranberries.

Sikri, fat and noisy, began to whimper on top of her barrel, pushing away from her the rusty tin pan that was her own bad-berry dish; and then Alina said suddenly, "Oh!" and raised

quick fingers to her hair. All night she had moaned in her sleep as the tightly bound knots of rags tweaked and ached, but to-day her light brown hair was a beautiful frizzy halo about her cheeks as she patted with begrimed fingers, fearful of touching, having to touch, while her eyes showed us where to look for the newness and surprise.

Down the road it came, chugging and swaying, and so close that, even as we turned to see, the cobwebbed window framed the black canvas-topped automobile like a dusty frame its work of art.

"Perkins," Pa hissed. He leaped up from beside a row of full boxes and stared at the hammer in his hand as if he did not know what to do with it; he did not seem to know what to do with his legs, or even with us who cluttered up the orderliness of boxes and barrels. Then, in a frenzy of speed, he ran to the big box where the beautiful "top" berries were kept and from it carried a pailful to pour into the unfilled barrel at the screen's mouth. We all knew, of course, that those largest and most hard-gleaming of berries, carefully selected, went in a thin layer on the top and bottom of every barrel ready to be sold, for who could tell which end of the barrel would be opened and examined?

Alina's smooth cheeks were as red as the berries in front of her; and through the open barn door came the two men, the instant their feet touched our vine-littered floor intensifying the acrid-sweet odors of hay and cranberries and oil-stove, revealing to us the thick festoons of cobwebs and the frayed patch at Ma's sweater elbow. Only the store-bought greenness of Alina's Sunday hat was right and proper.

Seventeen, Alina was, and she would never let you forget it. "I'm seventeen, aren't I?" she kept demanding of me. "Ma wasn't more than seventeen when she was married." She had started in again that night when the Perkins' automobile came for the first time, four days ago, and we lay side by side in bed; but there was nothing new in what she told me, only in the name. Warren, his name was, she told me, as if I cared. At one time it had been Caleb Washburn, who had lived all of his life only a mile away from us, and then one of the Rogers boys

from Eastboro started to walk home with her Sunday nights from church.

The way Warren Perkins kept looking at her there at the screen, she had whispered fiercely to me; the way he smiled at her, and the nice way he talked, like he had been to high school, even, and he must have, too. Why, they were rich, they had an automobile, and Warren's father just rode around buying cranberries.

If only there had been someone else to whom she could have told all these things, all this long drawn-out secret chatter of marriage and being able to get away; no more picking or screening, she kept saying, O Lord, was she sick and tired of it, hands so red, nothing pretty to wear. And just having to stay at home nights; O Lord God, what would it be like to live in the city, in North Halworth, where Warren Perkins lived, and go to see a moving picture show sometimes, even once, just once.

But those others who had come to Ma so soon after Alina, Hilma, Arne, and the one without any name, never having lived at all, had been put away sleeping forever; and then it was my turn to come and now Alina was seventeen.

Mr. Perkins strolled around poking his hands into barrels and boxes, rolling the berries around in the palm of his hand, snuffing at them, and selecting now and then one particular berry to chew on.

"Well, I don't know, Terho," he said at last, squinting at his handful of berries; and Pa hopped from his right foot to the left.

"Goot berry, Mister Perkins, all my berry goot, ha, haa," Pa shrilled in his English-speaking voice, high and squeaky, and he teetered on his long skinny legs in terrible unsurety.

But Warren Perkins made his way by the piles of boxes as if they were just an indifferent obstruction in his path. He leaned one elbow over the side of the screen and felt the berries with his hand, but his narrow dark eyes flicked over all of us and rested on Alina's red cheeks.

"How are the ladies today?" he asked, laughing a little.

Ma, of course, acted as if she had not heard or seen any-

thing beyond the berries directly in front of her, because she knew what she was, just a woman; and this she knew always and forever.

"All right," Alina answered then, hoarsely, and pretending to go on screening.

Then Sikri and I looked up, having need of seeing so close at hand the strangeness of features; and the young man, glancing up in turn, raised his wide dark eyebrows and made his mouth into the puckered shape of whistling, only he did not make any sound. He just kept on looking, and then he started to laugh.

"Well! Hello, Big Blue Eyes!" he said. "How are you?"

There was a swollen frozen berry close to my thumb and I picked it up and squeezed it as hard as I could so that the red juice squirted out.

"Goodness, Esmerald, why don't you answer when you're spoken to?" Alina demanded with a foolish smile.

"Oh, she's bashful," Warren Perkins said. "Just bashful, aren't you, Blue Eyes? Not like big sister, eh?"

He turned toward Alina, moving a little so that his right arm touched the sleeve of her brown winter coat. "All dolled up today, aren't you?" He looked pleased. Then he glanced in the direction of Ma and said in a low, rapid voice: "All the pretty girls stuck by themselves out here in the woods. How's that? Don't you like to go out, like riding in an automobile?"

"Oh, yeah, I do," Alina croaked.

Ma kept on picking out bad berries near the mouth of the screen, her head bent downward, eyes following the tumbling of red under her fingers.

"How about tomorrow night, then?"

"Tomorrow night?" Alina's breath came out in a slow, relaxed sigh. The too-red flood of color receded from her throat and forehead leaving only the pretty pink of her cheeks, and she fluffed a bit of crinkly hair with delicately poised fingers.

"Why, I don't know, Mr. Perkins," she said, and her voice was genteel and assured. "You see, my mother and father are sort of old-fashioned." She laughed in a refined, deprecatory way. "Back here in the country we aren't so used to automo-

biles and things like that. But I go quite a lot to the Grange suppers and things. Next Saturday night it just happens there's going to be a Grange supper at the town hall."

She lowered her eyes, and, her mouth in a demure half-smile, daintily plucked out a tiny wizened berry and dropped it into the bad-berry can.

"What time is the supper?"

"Why, half-past six, I believe. Why, Mr. Perkins, you don't mean—"

But of course she knew all the time, and we others knew; only right after he had gone, Ma set her hand against the mouth of the screen and turned to look with frightened eyes at Alina. She said, "No auto riding."

"Oh, Lord God . . . I know, Mamma, but—"

"No auto riding," Ma said in a voice flattened by shock and pity.

That Saturday night the black-topped automobile came rattling through a roadful of dust, brushing the low branches of an apple tree at the road's turning, and we younger ones forgot the game we were playing in the wide sandy back yard.

Pa came out of the wagon shed, strolling leisurely, as if he had not been waiting since suppertime, and wearing his company smile that drew out all the fierce blue of his eyes and left them veiled and sleepy-looking. Seeing him now it was hard to remember how his eyes had blazed a little while ago when he yelled at Alina, "My berries I am going to sell to Perkins, but that does not mean I also made a bargain for my daughter to go auto riding!" And Alina, who had stormed and wept and then tried pleading, only to fly into a passion again, came out of the house in her bright green hat with her cheeks softly pink, smiling at Pa and Warren Perkins. She asked in English if it would be all right for Mr. Perkins to leave his automobile in the clearing beside the road; Pa said, "Sure, sure," as if it were a ridiculous thing for her to suggest leaving the auto behind, but since that was what she wished, so long as she wanted to walk. . . .

We children took the short cut through the little orchard, stumbling over rotted apples and with the icy dew of evening

snatching at our bare legs. Alina did not even ride down to the road, so Warren Perkins had a moment's waiting when he got out of the automobile. He took off his cap and put it on again, feeling the peak of it carefully with his hand, and there was a spot of dark red high up on each of his cheeks. But when he noticed us, who had fancied ourselves invisible standing like three small statues at the clearing's edge, the uneasiness left him and he was himself as we knew him at the screen.

"Hello there, Big Blue Eyes," he said, twinkling and alert. "Where'd you get those eyes; huh, Esmerald? Say, cat got your tongue?"

Sikri giggled, and I wanted to slap her; and I felt like slapping Esta, too, who had made no sound and hardly breathed.

"Getting to be a big girl, aren't you, Esmerald?" His eyes, bright and amused, moved down over my sweater and tight dress and rested fleetingly at the knees; but before he could say anything else Alina was there beside us, tall and splendid in her frizzled shiny hair and her skirt peeping discreetly from below her long coat.

"Oh, I hope you don't *mind* walking, Mr. Perkins," she said, leaving her lips parted in a faint smile.

"Not at all. That's a big girl, Esmerald. How old is she, anyway; about fourteen?"

"Oh, goodness gracious, no!" Alina's little laugh was high-pitched and artificial sounding, but refined. "She isn't twelve yet. Well, be good children, now."

We wanted to kick her; but we kept on standing without moving a finger and watched them walking off together, well apart and dignified looking, with Alina taking short fast steps in her hobble skirt, the back part of her tightly buttoned coat in busy motion to balance the narrowness of steps and imprisonment of hands in her little round muff.

When they got past the orchard, Sikri and Esta let out their breaths in a long whoop and began to pummel each other, and then Sikri cried, "Let's play Hilly-Over some more! Come on, Esmerald, it's my turn to throw the ball."

But I passed my hand down over my skimpy dress and said, "I wish I had my coat on."

"It isn't cold!" they shouted.

And I didn't feel cold. We never wore our coats when we were playing until it was really winter; but gnarled old apple trees, bent toward the ground, were stripped and naked, and high in the taut and darkly glimmering sky a solitary star rode in timelessness. From the orchard the smell of rotting apples rose heady and tantalizing, repellent and maddeningly sweet.

"Let's play house, then," Sikri said, running for the dolls; and we made a little house near the flat upturned stone by the hen yard, with sticks marking off the rooms, kitchen, other room, bedroom; and visitors came to call, smiling at each other with veiled sleepy eyes. "Now, be good children," my doll Daisy Bell said to two armless rag sailor dolls; and I raised my hand to my face.

Feeling them, they did not seem big at all, just fluttery at the touch of my fingers; just two eyes, like Sikri's and Esta's.

But when we went up to bed, I turned up the wick of the kerosene lamp, for there was a mirror over the bureau. Still, when the flame was so high that it began to quiver, there was nothing really to see: only my own face, angry-looking in concentration, a smooth little oval between the thick gleaming braids of light hair, and the black-fringed eyes that stared back in a fury of questioning.

I blew out the lamp with one tremendous puff and ran to my bed, thinking, Oh, I hate everybody, everybody, and for a little while I was afraid I would have to cry, but almost at once I fell asleep.

The next morning at breakfast Pa was tight and hard about the mouth.

"So, Alina? So, then?"

The way he waited for her to answer it was easy to see that whatever he was demanding of her was nothing new, that between them this bitter contest had started long before.

Alina helped herself to some baked beans, but when she had them on the plate in front of her she stared at them in desperate defiance.

"Twenty minutes past ten," Pa said then, still with frigid control, but his eyes crackled their blue fire over the table.

Alina lifted a spoonful of beans to her mouth.

"Twenty minutes past ten!" Pa shouted at the top of his voice, bringing his fist down on the table so that all of the dishes rattled. "What kind of an hour is that for a respectable girl to come sneaking home? Answer me, Alina. What were you doing all night?"

"I have nothing to be ashamed about," Alina said, looking him squarely in the eye though her voice was shaking. "It takes a long time to eat at one of those places and it takes a long time to walk two miles. Since I was forbidden to ride in the auto—"

"Auto, auto! We know all about those auto rides, and no daughter of mine—"

Then Ma came in from milking and the cats began to circle around her, so we helped to pour milk into their dishes and watched out that the kittens did not fall into the deep saucers. By then Alina was crying as loudly as she could, and shrieking, "It's just because he's an American, and who else is there? Aren't I an American, too?"

Pa swayed back and forth on his long legs, staring at her as if he did not fully recognize her, as if he regretted her existence and his own, as well.

Afterward, when she followed me into the hen yard, Alina told me that Pa had said she could not go out any more with Warren Perkins; but she did not care what Pa said. Warren was going to take her to the corner church next week to see the lantern slides, and if Pa and Ma didn't like it, well, they knew what they could do. Alina was just going to leave this hellhole. She demanded of me, "Do they want me to be an old maid? They got married, didn't they? And what makes them so evil-minded and suspicious, anyway? I'll marry whoever I want to."

But I forgot all about Warren Perkins and the lantern slides until the evening when his automobile came again through the bitter, lonely autumn dusk. This time he stopped the machine in the clearing and when he got out, instead of starting right toward the house he came over to stand near us children, where we had been playing squat tag. His cap was pushed back off

his forehead so that a few strands of dark curly hair showed above his flickering brown eyes.

"How's Big Blue Eyes tonight?" he said, and I remembered that I did not have my coat on. "Oh, come on, you don't have to be scared of me."

He began to laugh. "What's there to be scared about, Blue Eyes? Come on, look at me. Don't you like me, Esmerald?"

I could feel the ground mist icy against my legs and knew them as bare with my dress stopping just at the knees and the knowledge filled me with a mingling of terror and rage. I turned suddenly and ran to the house as fast as I could.

In the kitchen, they were having a furious discussion; Pa said he would shake Alina by the hair until her teeth rattled if she did not go at once to tell Warren Perkins that she was not going out with him. The very way Alina held her arms, awkwardly, slightly upraised, showed the enormity of her defiance; but there was in her face a queer kind of impotency, as if she knew that she could struggle and defy and never quite be able to beat this baffling and shapeless opposition.

For she could see only her own desiring, what had come before her was nonexistent; so how could they explain to her when even for themselves there were no words? It was just that the world was big and strange, and that all newness, of which they had seen so much, was terrifying; night was so boundless and she was still so young. Marriage was a security and a haven for all women, but the yawning chasm of courtship was a frightful thing to be faced even in one's native land, where one could understand something, at least.

(Oh, that had been a country, too, high up at the top of the world, with night overlapping into the realm of day; oh, the long winter nights, the snow, the forests, the ten thousand lakes. "I had a little cat," Mamma would tell us when we asked her how it was back there. "He used to sit with me beside our lake." But when we kept on demanding more, she could only gaze at us in muted disbelief because her lake was now so far away.)

Alina was about to repeat again words she must have worn thin with saying over and over when her eyes fell on me. She

checked herself and stared at me. Then, rather breathlessly, and now humbly imploring, she said,

"If someone went with me, it would be all right, wouldn't it? Esmerald could go, couldn't she? It's just to the church."

It was not all right with them, that was easy to see, but they looked at Alina as she was, a young lady with the fearful rights of youth; and they had learned long ago about compromises. So Pa turned away, muttering into his drooping mustache, and Ma told me to hurry and put on my stockings and Sunday dress, speaking fast so that she would not have time for pondering.

The others, Alina and Warren, were waiting for me by the road and they started off together before I quite reached them; and when we passed our nearest neighbors' house, they all, Suleima, Venla, Taimi, all of them, watched us going by sedately in our best clothes and I felt superior to everyone in the Kantilla household.

But when we had gone by the farm buildings I forgot everything else under the wonder of being abroad at nighttime. Stillness of fields I felt, the breathing out of mist from pores of the earth, and pools of shadow growing without the need of sunlight; the mystery of night's falling. Two crows rose cawing from a dead stump in a sudden swamp and it seemed that my heart must burst in jubilation and marveling that crows should fly and hoarsely scream so far from any house, in almost darkness, and that I, Esmerald, should chance to see them.

Once Warren Perkins turned around and said, "Scared of the dark, Esmerald?"

But he was far away and without substance, and Alina I might have left at home for any semblance of reality there was about her.

The church was strange and lovely with its own subdued musty smell and all the lamps dimly glowing in a level row along the walls, and a tightly stretched white curtain in front of the platform. Sammy Hooper, our Sunday School teacher, went around on tiptoe and turned down the lamps so that against the vastness of night crouching at every window was only the barest hush of holy light.

"Dark and spooky, huh, Blue Eyes?" Warren whispered to me. He was sitting between Alina and me. "You scared?"

"Of course not." I was impatient with him for thinking I would be frightened, or pretending that he thought so, teasing me; and I wished he did not take up so much room. Even squeezing as hard as I could against the side of the pew I could feel him against me, his leg leaning toward mine.

But then the pictures started and a man who was a stranger, with a pale mild face, lifted up a long pointer and began to tell us about the Holy Land. "At the time of my visit to Palestine," he said, and I stared at him in respect and awe, and the pictures of dark-skinned people in flowing garments stopped my breath in entrancement.

"Look at the feller with the long whiskers; hi, Santa!" Warren whispered, and Alina put her hand against her mouth to stifle her giggling.

The visiting missionary paused to drink a glass of water; on the screen was a piece of blankness following a picture that slid off toward the right before the next slide could fit into its place. Sheep, they were, this time, dozens and hundreds of them, and I sat up higher to see over the shoulder of the fat woman in front of me; and as I straightened myself I felt something fall lightly on my thigh. When I looked, it was only Warren's hand, and his clean-cut profile was turned in the direction of the screen. I wriggled a little, but his hand did not fall away.

The trouble was that it was so crowded in our pew; I leaned forward to see and at the same moment Warren turned his face toward me. He was so big, blocking all of my view and crowding me against the pew's side, that I felt a sense of smothering, and in the strange half-light his features were somehow distorted and bigger than life. There was an utter stillness to his face, an intent questioning though his eyes were lost in darkness. A triangle of shadow showed the slight flaring of his nostrils and he watched me out of his still, blank, searching eyes.

"Hello, Blue Eyes," he said softly, letting out his breath, and grinned, and it was just Warren, Alina's beau. But when I

looked at the screen, olive trees and camels were jumbled together senselessly and only the shadow falling from the screen was clear, a blackness that fell obliquely from it against two low steps beyond; and very pronounced was the darkness at windows, and the heavy odor of dust mingled with the smell of human bodies. With my eyes shut I would have known it was not Pa, or Alina, or any of the Kantillas sitting next to me; anywhere and at any time I would have known it was Warren Perkins; and that was strange because there was about him no particular odor that I could have placed, he smelled clean so that you knew he was washed and everything he wore was fresh and neat. But still it was there, all about him, something that made you want to get up and hit somebody, or to throw out your arms and shake your head and stamp on the ground as hard as you could. It was like pain to have to go on just sitting; I could feel a peculiar tingling at my knees, a dull frenzy of prickling, and all I could do was sit still, holding myself against the pew's side. So when the final slide at last slipped from the white curtain and the missionary had finished his prayer, I clambered over the others' knees in my need of getting out quickly.

Outside, moonlight fell icy and blue against my face, and I gasped in momentary bewilderment for I had not known about the moon, but the next instant I felt giddy with release. So that was why it had seemed so stifling and dark inside the church; I ran down the steep incline behind the building, feeling the sureness of my own feet beneath me and recognizing them as my own, and aware of my own body in this intoxication of motion. I thought, Why, this is me; I am Esmerald Maki.

Behind me, Warren shouted, "Hey, what's the matter, Esmerald?" I stopped so suddenly that I teetered on my toes to catch my balance, and then I ran back toward them.

"Esmerald, don't act so silly," Alina said, but without the certainty of real annoyance. She was holding to Warren's arm and they strolled close together, throwing out a single shadow that hugged the moon-whitened shrubs beside the road.

"Can't you see the moon?" I cried.

Warren said, "Ha! Moon-crazy, that's what she is." There was a sudden surge of excitement in his voice and when I spun around he reached out to catch hold of me. "Hey, not so fast, you moon-crazy!"

Then he started after me. That was better; that was what I needed, someone trying to catch me. For I could run faster than anybody in the whole world, and I'd show him; and not just along the plain road, either. Down toward the pond, that was the place to go, along the deep ruts of wagon tracks where your feet had to be nimble and sure, right down to the very water's edge.

I could hear him behind me, getting closer. There was a narrow sand bar that ran a little way out in the shallow water; I darted onto it and then on the upturned boat that lay at its head, balancing precariously there on slipperiness of flat boards.

"Go away, go away," I shouted at Warren, waving my arms.

He started to walk toward me. "You'll fall in; hey, watch out, you little moon-crazy! The water's cold. You like cold water, eh? I bet you do, too, you're just crazy enough."

"Esmerald!" Alina had come down from the road and stood in an opening between scrawny birches. "Come back here right away, and you just wait till you get home."

"Oh, you," I said to Warren. He was trying to catch hold of my arms, and moonlight pounded like music and like thunder on the tiny strip of pebbly white beach. I reached out my hand suddenly and knocked the cap from his head.

"You little devil." His laughter was breathless-sounding and, panting a little, he caught my wrist and whirled me around toward him. "I'll teach you to—"

I punched him against the chest with my hand stiff and flat, and I felt the texture of his coat against my palm after I quickly withdrew my hand; and the solidness of his chest under the coat.

"Esmerald," Alina said in a shrill voice, close beside the boat.

Then Warren stooped down and picked up his cap and began to dust it with his hand, only there was no dust on it, just a little water that sprayed out in tiny silvered drops. He did not

look at either of us, but when he took Alina by the arm he pretended to laugh.

"God, she's a husky kid," he said.

Alina, in the strident, unsteady voice, said to me, "Button your coat."

With my coat flying wide open, I ran down the moon-dappled road, but pretty soon I began to run more slowly, and the next thing I knew I was walking and not even wanting to walk. Other things, though, I felt urgently impelled to do: to select a tree and, setting my hands hard against its trunk, climb upward, swinging myself lightly hand over hand until I had conquered the smooth defiant shape of trunk up to the branches; or, keeping my secret purpose to myself, to spring with all my strength at the glittering blinking specks of phosphorescence that gleamed like fireflies from moss-covered stumps and then squash them out with my bare hands. I could find them tonight, I knew; it would not be like other times when in our search for them, certain of having selected the exact spot of light, the gleam would disappear just as we reached out to seize it. Anything and everything I could do tonight.

But when Alina and Warren emerged suddenly out of the shadows, I was still standing in the middle of the road. Without any sign of having noticed them, I started walking again, but I knew they could see me and were aware of me; and for a while that was enough. Then, just before I got to the bottom of Kantilla's hill, the simple knowledge no longer satisfied.

I spun around and tore back along the road and, still running, hit Warren on the arm, crying, "You're It!"

He would have started after me, I knew that, even when, after the first impulsive motion, at once checked, he only laughed and kept on walking close to Alina. It didn't matter that he did not come. I circled around and ran on in front of them, all the rest of the way home. Then, the blood pounding in my ears, my heart in very pain from its thumping, I sat down on the running board of Warren's automobile.

Alina glanced toward the darkened house when they reached the place where our own little road started its horseshoe course

around the clutter of house and barn and sheds. She said uncertainly, "Well, I guess I'd better hurry along."

I got up slowly and started toward the patch of field that lay in full flood of moonlight in front of the house.

"Hello, there's Esmerald," Warren said.

I stooped down and plucked at a limp cluster of grass. I said to myself, Goodness, it isn't a flower after all; but I knew that all the time I had known it was just grass.

"Well, I've got to go in now," Alina said, not making any kind of move.

Maybe there would be a flower, a bit of autumn-browned clover, by our road's beginning. I walked along the field, looking down, this way and that.

"Lose something?" Warren asked. "What're you looking for, huh? Won't talk. You know how to say good-night, though, don't you? Esmerald, huh?"

I tossed my head. "I wouldn't say good-night to *you*!"

Alina smiled; with the moonlight full on her face I saw her teeth, widely exposed, the two rows of them, but there was no dimple line in her cheek nor any crinkling about the eyes. "You better go in the house, Esmerald; I'll come right away."

"Good-night, Blue Eyes," Warren said. "See you later."

"No, you won't."

In the kitchen was emptiness and the lamp turned low, telling of night and everybody sleeping; from the stove came a little sharp crackle that faded at once into nothingness. My own breathing was heavy and racy as if I had been tussling and my face burned from the lashing of frosty night air; I held my hands out over the stove, but from it came only the feeblest suggestion of heat.

How large the stove was with its crook of round black pipe that fitted so tightly into the hole of whitewashed chimney; and the shape of the stove itself I had never noticed before, the broad squatness of it, the breadth and force of it, filling completely this corner of the kitchen. An alien thing it was without the simmering of hot water kettle and the day-long aroma of boiling coffee, something stark and secret and dominant in the close kitchen smell.

There was another odor, too, and one that did not quite belong; I turned my head, sniffing. Hay, that was it, and a suggestion of henyard. A hen in the house, I thought incredulously; and there was the hen, in a cracker box lined with hay, back of the stove. It cocked its head sideways to look at me from one bright round eye and I knelt down beside it in an abandon of comfort. There was a sore-looking spot on the hen's back where the dull rust-colored feathers had sloughed off or been pecked off by other hens; I stroked the thick wing feathers very lightly because my fingers were still cold. Just to think of it, a poor old sick hen all by herself here in the kitchen that she had never even known about before, and looking at me now trustfully, maybe remembering me from all the times I had scattered corn for her.

When all at once I became aware of Alina's pointed shoes beside the stove I looked up eagerly to tell her about the hen; but Alina said,

"You get up." Her voice was low and shaken. At the same instant I heard the loud sputtering and the string of muffled explosions that told of the automobile being cranked out beside the road.

Blinking a little, I started to get up, but Alina yanked me to my feet.

"Oh, you *fool*," she cried softly. She raised her arm as if to strike me but did not let it fall. "I'd like to kill you! I wish I. . . ."

Her face worked convulsively and she kept opening and shutting her mouth with only a thick gasping sound coming from her lips. Then she took hold of my shoulders and began to shake me. "What do you mean by acting like that? What kind of a devil are you? Carrying on like that, *flirting*. Flirting like that. . . ."

"Oh, you're hurting me," I whimpered, with all my faculties seizing hold of the everyday surety of pain, which I could understand.

"It's the last time, do you hear? You aren't ever going out with me again, do you hear me, Esmerald?"

Then suddenly she let go of me and her arms fell down

inertly. She stared at me as if her eyes could not hold all they had to see, as if she were looking at my face magnified and multiplied in an endless procession of nights, and her cheeks grew pale under the monstrous betrayal.

I gulped loudly, but Alina swept a hard hand across my eyes. "Ssh, ssh, somebody's coming downstairs. Keep still, now. You hear?"

Pa came in with his hair stiffly rumpled, sleepy-looking, in his heavy white undershirt and long drawers. He darted a quick look at us and went to the table, where he lifted up a clean towel.

"Well, then, have some milk and cookies, and get to bed," he said. "Put the towel back when you've finished. Esmerald, have some milk."

He poured from a full glass pitcher. "Did any cats come in with you? Did you lock the door?" He went to the door and tried it, raised a window shade to peer out at the thermometer.

"Hurry up, then. We have to get up in the morning again. All the bottom berries have to be screened tomorrow."

Alina went to the table and sat down. She took a cookie from the plate.

But I could only think, Oh, *Pappa*, screening? Oh, Pa, screening in our own barn, with Mamma and Sikri and Esta and the separator whirring like mad and everybody together in daytime the way it always used to be?

"You didn't frighten the sick hen, did you?" Pa demanded. "It's cold tonight. Cold." He stood beside the stove, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, looking at us in a kind of bewilderment with his eyes exposed and defenseless as his big bare feet on the cold floor.

"Screening tomorrow; well then." He shut the door carefully behind him.

I turned as fast as I could and hurried after him, and we went up the steep rag-carpeted stairway together. The lamp on the floor between the two bedrooms made a low uneven pool of light that ebbed into darkness just beyond the doorsills. I could not see into the other bedroom but I heard a faint creaking and Ma's voice, startled-sounding at first, "Eh, is that you,

Esmerald? Did you get tired?" And then, falling back into a sigh, "Hurry into bed, *pulusini*, and don't forget to pray."

Pa closed the door after him, almost shut, but still not tight enough to latch it.

I was shivering all over and my hands in taking off coat, dress, petticoats, were awkward and numb, but I did not feel cold. The only thing I recognized was the imperative need of getting into bed as quickly as possible, and of then falling immediately asleep. Then everything would be all right, tomorrow we were screening just as usual; only right now, in this strange hostile quietness, moonlight dead and white on the window sill, everybody lost to me in sleep and Alina about to come up any moment, I had to get to sleep right away. I pulled my nightgown over my union suit and drew the covers high about my head.

When I was turned over on my side Alina came upstairs. Oh, heavens, I wasn't asleep yet, and in just a minute she would get in beside me. . . . I squeezed my eyes tight until my face began to hurt. What was she going to do to me; what awful things was she going to say in that strangling, hating voice, accusing me. . . . If I could only fall asleep, fall asleep quickly.

I felt the fanning of cold air against my body as she raised the quilts, and the lurching of bedsprings when she lay down. She stayed at the far side of the bed, turned away from me, and did not say a word.

It was so still through the house that I could plainly hear the ticking of the big clock downstairs, and it was a disturbing sound because I had never heard it up in my bed before. From the closet (was it?) or the attic, from somewhere through the thin and night-blackened walls came a sudden snapping, a splintery running up and down, but when, tensed, I listened, there was nothing to hear but a hoarse snoring from the other room. And Alina; Alina was not breathing at all.

I turned around cautiously, holding my own breath. Oh, yes; she was breathing, but only in a kind of muffled gasping. Then I knew; she was crying and trying not to make any sound.

"Oh, Alina!" I whispered. "I'm sorry, Alina, please—"

"Shut up."

"But I didn't mean—"

"Ssh; go to sleep."

Whatever I had done to her, it must be something terrible to make her cry like that, all to herself. If only I could fall asleep, because then it would be morning, with sunlight, and Ma coming in from milking, and the smell of coffee filling the kitchen and the kittens falling into their milk saucer; oh, if only it would be morning.

I lay as still as I could so that she would not have to remember about me right there beside her, but I could not fall asleep. The bed felt hot, and against my face the night air was clammy and biting.

Then, after a long time, Alina stopped the feeble choking and gulping and lay relaxed and heavy against me, sound asleep. Pa had stopped snoring, and there was nothing in the whole night but the loud steady ticking of the clock, going on and on, never hesitating, never once stopping; ticktock, ticktock.

I pressed my hands against my ears, but even then I could hear it; and I was sick with the need of telling someone how loud and frightening is the *ticktock, ticktock, ticktock* of the clock when you have to hear it all alone.

# *Late Afternoon of a Nymph*

---

by VICTORIA LINCOLN

THE radio in Chloe's room went on suddenly with such sustained power that the walls of her father's study, below, vibrated. Mr. Carter rubbed his hand across the bridge of his nose, bit his lips, and shook his head a little, like a dog with water in its ears. The formulas on the page before him appeared to dance uneasily, several figures and Greek letters transposing themselves. Mr. Carter's pencil wavered.

"*I love you*," said the wall behind him. "*Take it from there!*"

He went out into the kitchen. Mrs. Carter was at the stove.

"Just a minute," said Mrs. Carter. "I'm concentrating."

She licked the spoon thoughtfully and her face relaxed.

"This will kill you," she announced, smiling. "Darling, don't you think I'm wonderful? After the war I'm going to hire out."

"Why isn't Chloe down here helping you?"

"I'll call her if I want her."

"She ought to come without calling. And another thing: do you think that maybe Chloe is deaf?"

"Deaf?" Mrs. Carter looked puzzled. "*I love you*," said the dining-room door, suddenly. "*Take it from there.*" Mrs. Carter's face cleared, and she shook her head. "When I was young," she said, "I used to get extra loud needles, a kind they made for beer parlors."

"She must be deaf," reiterated Mr. Carter.

But Chloe was not deaf. She lay at full length on her bed, the radio by her ear turned all the way up, so that the torrential fervor of Harry James could splash over her at full tilt. Her favorite book was balanced upon her diaphragm, and the ecstasy of the trumpet mingled in richness with the final

agonies of Lord Esketh, dying of bubonic plague right there between her long brown eyes and her floating rib. Lord Esketh writhed, the trumpet sobbed, and Chloe's toes curled and uncurled. "Listen to that," she whispered reverently, "doesn't that send you?"

Now the long cadence fell and died, the bouncing voice of the announcer arose, and one slender hand turned the page and fell at Chloe's side to fumble the wrappings of a stick of gum. Then her knees came up to prop the book, freeing both hands so that the gum, with a nice weighing of voluptuousness and greed, might be neatly divided, the remainder pocketed, thriftily, against a rainy day.

Lord Esketh's tongue filled his whole mouth. He fell on the floor and rolled about in the horror of his delirium. Chloe's short, kitten-like jaws moved rhythmically, her sweet, round forehead smooth and serene, her long dark eyes dilated with awful delight. She rolled on her side, cheek in hand, turning another page, her long honey-tan hair falling over her cheek. Chloe was fifteen.

On the walls above her were thumbtacked the faces of Frank Sinatra and Alan Ladd. In a silver frame on the bedside table, superimposed upon the photograph of her grandmother, were Robert Taylor and Chuck Welsh. Chuck was the high-school football star of last year, now in the Army. His picture was also in the round gold locket on the bowknot pin that Chloe wore above her heart. She had written him four letters, none of which he had answered. Chloe was still too young to value anything that she could possess.

"Chloe! Chlo-eel!"

Over the infinite soothing of the music, through the heavy air of the bungalow where Lord Esketh lay dead, her mother's voice penetrated. Chloe's forehead wrinkled, and one hand went automatically to the knob of the radio, reducing by a barely perceptible degree, the delicious volume of sound.

"Chloe! Answer me!"

Chloe sighed and turned another page.

"Chloe, your father is trying to do some work. Turn it down."

"O.K.," said Chloe in a conversational tone. "Keep your shirt on." She turned her face toward the closed door. "I did!" she shouted.

"Further down! Lower!"

"Mother, for Pete's sake, I can barely hear it now."

But again the long hand, reluctant and resentful, moved the knob one degree to the left. With the minuscular diminution of sound the music became just not enough. The book, too, suffered a sympathetic dilution, lost its magic, fell to the bed.

"It's no use," thought Chloe. "In another minute it will be something about did you put the lawn chairs back in the garage, or did you do your homework, or are you ready for supper?" She sat up, her short, pretty face fierce with frustration.

"Why don't we live in New York?" she demanded aloud.

She got up and went to her dressing table, where she studied her face, front view and profile. "Or Hollywood," she added. "Or anywhere except this dump."

Now she tried her hair first in a pompadour and then over one eye. With a purple lipstick she enlarged her mouth to heavy Negroid proportions, regarded it gravely, sighed, and reached for the cold cream.

"A dump," she repeated. Her eyes went out into the shady back yard, rested on the old white trellis and the mulberry trees. "What could ever happen," she thought, hopelessly, "in a dump like this?" She reached for another lipstick, geranium red, and looked in the glass again. "A dump," she repeated heavily. And then, in a long, pitiful wail, "Oh, why doesn't anybody ever fall for me but *goons*?"

With the outcry it was as if all the emptiness and boredom had come down in one crashing wave. Chloe pushed herself back from the mirror in a galvanic burst of energy. She snapped Harry James into silence in the middle of a skyrocketing cadenza. She swept a handful of objects off the top of her dressing table onto a shelf below, twitching the curtains over it. She cleared the top of her bureau by the same method, slamming the drawers tight shut. She kicked a pair of play shoes and one

bedroom slipper under the floor-length ruffle of the cretonne bedspread.

“Chloe! Chloe, answer me!”

“What?”

“Chloe, dear, it’s time for you to set the table.”

“Mother, in a minute. For heaven’s sake, Mother, one *minute*.”

With an unchanged tempo of frenzied activity, as if the things she now did must be finished before the last train pulled out, before the invaders came, she snatched the picture of Alan Ladd from the wall and began leafing rapidly back and forth through the heap of movie magazines on her desk, back and forth, the tip of her tongue between her teeth, her fingers tense. It was in one of them. She saw it last month. Only she just never registered. Not until she saw him making love to Jean Arthur. Joel McCrea. Joel. A full page.

“Chloe, come down!”

“Mother, for the thousandth time, just a minute!”

Maybe it was month before last. He had on a white turtle-neck sweater and he was looking straight at you. The other kind were too maddening. Oh, it must be right here, somewhere. Near the front. Full page.

Her fingers slacked. Goodness, she thought, Rita Hayworth has a lovely figure. Only it would be more fun to be tiny like Veronica Lake. Oh, she is so sweet. And Chloe, five foot seven, drawn with a fluid and powerful line, sat thinking of Veronica Lake, drawing herself down small like a great Dane puppy dreaming of the day when it should grow up into a Pomeranian.

The telephone rang, downstairs in the front of the house, barely audible through the closed doors of the bedroom. The magazines poured to the floor. Chloe was halfway down the stairs and across the hall before the bell could ring twice.

“I’ll take it! I’ll take it!”

Mrs. Carter saw her daughter fall against the telephone table, lift the instrument, and drop her weight upon the bench.

“Hello?” said Chloe. And the hope, the expectancy in her voice were like the morning of the day when God said, Let there be light.

Mrs. Carter knew quite well that the next words, spoken in an agony of controlled disappointment, would be, "Oh, it's you. Hi." And still it seemed to her that the wonder of immeasurable hope that could bring her daughter, like that, on wings day after day to speak that first dazzling "Hello?" to expect so endlessly the all-transmuting miracle, was an infinitely desirable, a heavenly thing.

She and her husband did not wait for Chloe. Wisely, they began to eat.

"Oh, it's you," said Chloe. "Hi."

After a considerable time she sat down at the table.

"Greg's late," she observed, virtuously.

"He's out, dear. He went home from Scouts with Pete for supper."

"Well, it's something to have one meal in peace."

Greg, an amiable child of eleven, was not a habitual destroyer of the peace. Mr. and Mrs. Carter, however, accepted their daughter's comment for what it was, the general expression of a troubled spirit.

"Was it Bud?" asked Mrs. Carter.

"Yeah."

"Oh, well." The consolatory words were meaningless, but gentle.

"The prize goon of the school," said Chloe fiercely. "Haven't we got any pickles, or grape jelly, or *anything*?"

"Chloe," said Mr. Carter, "*didn't you set the table?*"

Mrs. Carter closed her eyes.

"Mother did," said Chloe. "I had to clean my room." She picked up her fork. "And another thing," she said. "I didn't get my allowance, and when I mowed the front lawn you said you'd pay me when I did the back, but Greg did the back, so that's half, and twenty-eight from the time I paid the paper-boy when you were at the movies is a dollar-twenty-eight, and if you'll make it a dollar-fifty, which I have to have, I'll vacuum the inside of the car and wipe the windows off tonight."

Mrs. Carter breathed again. It would take a stronger mind than her husband's to remember the table setting through this.

"A dollar-fifty?"

"Yes, I have to have it. If I vacuum the car right after supper will you pay me the minute it's done?"

"Sure," said Mr. Carter.

"You see," said his daughter, with an unexpected burst of confidence, "I owe everybody in the world a coke, and what's more I need buttons."

"Buttons?"

"Yes, of course, buttons. Everyone looks at your buttons now they're so expensive, and mine are all seedy. And tomorrow being Saturday I have to get down the first thing in the morning, of course."

Her face, which had been heavy with discontent, now lightened, grew lovely again in expectation. "Sally Anne's going with me," said Chloe, and her voice was perfectly happy. "We're both going to get a lot of them. Fancy ones."

Mr. Carter looked at her. He took another large helping of string beans.

"Buttons," he said softly, under his breath. His eyes were a little glazed. "Buttons," he said again.

# *The Hepburn Girls*

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*by* LENORE COTTEN

IF ANYONE should ask you, a Frenchman for instance, what sort of house nice Americans live in, there's one in Hartford, Connecticut, you might point out to him. A big rambling brick house it is, set far back from a shaded quiet street, circled by deep lawns and a high brick wall. A graveled drive leads to the garage and the back door, winding through evergreens and shrubberies. The casement windows are thrown wide open—and there are many of them. Walk up close, and you'll see a lot of cars in the garage, overflowing into the driveway. The phone is ringing. Somebody is playing Mozart on the piano with the loud pedal down, hard. Someone is calling, "Oh, Mo-o-ther. . . ." You know that there are children in this house, lots of them. Children grown up now to college age and the possession of those assorted cars in the drive. You'll have chosen a good house to show your foreigner. It's where the Hepburns live.

In 1939, when Katharine was playing on Broadway, there were more cars in the drive and the phones rang more often. In New York, she has a lovely old house in Turtle Bay. But when the last curtain falls on Saturday evening, she leaps for her car and home to Hartford. There, for two days, she is Father's girl, Mother's adored eldest, and sister to Bob and Dick and Marion and Margaret.

Seeing the three Hepburn girls together, you get a feeling that you have known them before. It is not only that they are so completely American. There is something in them of all the darling heroines of your favorite novels. They're by Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott, of course. They're cousins to Margaret Kennedy's mad Sangers, in their indomitable energy and

their free expression. The English county novels have made you know them, too—with their long tanned hands firm on a racket or the reins, their deep-rooted devotion to home and family *mores*.

When Katharine went to Hollywood and became as sensational a star as critics could contrive, the press made a *gaffe*. They thought she was affected and eccentric, that she put on an act. Katharine wasn't any of those things. She was being the daughter of the Hepburns of Hartford, taught from childhood to say and think and do as seemed good to her. If there is still any need for argument on the virtues of progressive education, the Hepburns will serve as examples of its best points.

Though Dr. Hepburn is a Virginian, and Mrs. Hepburn was born in New York State, there is something of New England in them. They would have been at home in the inspiriting airs of Beacon Hill and Brook Farm. It is a good atmosphere for children to grow up in. . . . As a child Katharine was a holy terror, a tomboy who fought with her small skilled fists in the neighborhood scraps, wore her brother's knickerbockers and, once, shaved her head. But Katharine did more than this. She sat quietly at tea while her mother talked to guests, or to committees on social questions, on civic problems, on birth control. Sat quietly, soaking up sense and free speaking and a conscience beyond the personal angle.

It was not surprising, then, that when she went to Bryn Mawr she was formed, an individual. She wore her old green coat nipped together with a big safety pin, because she loved it. She skewered her flyaway hair on top of her head, tied a bandanna over it when it rained and, not meaning to, started a fashion. And while she marched about the campus, slender faun's face alight, she was thinking of how best to conquer the stage and glory. She did it, too, only a little later, and in the meantime, she married Ogden Ludlow, and then divorced him. But he is still one of her closest friends, and in the house at Hartford, he is still "family." Then Hollywood made her a star, made her a beauty. But it never made her anything for a

moment except Katharine, daughter of the Hepburns of Hartford.

It is not usual to be a movie star. It is no less usual to be a movie star's younger sisters. But Marion and Peg took it in their stride and never missed a beat. Marion was fourteen when Katharine went to Hollywood, Peg was thirteen. They were tutoring at home then, getting ready for Bennington. Once there, Marion went quietly about her business, set on writing, majoring in literature, finding in herself such echoes of her mother's zeal for social reform that she picketed in Washington, while working for the C.I.O., as an experiment in actual field work. In June, Marion married, almost immediately after her graduation from Bennington. Her young husband, as ardent and thoughtful as she, graduated from Harvard *after* his wedding. His name is Ellsworth Grant (he intends to write, too). . . . Peg at Bennington discovered the laboratory, and a passion for science and research. She's taking after her father. You can picture her in a white lab coat, bending over a microscope—and she'll find out all there is to learn from looking in it, too. Peg is very like Katharine; Marion is not so tall as they. She is softer, with dimpled hands like a dear little girl of seven. But they are alike in coloring. . . . Katharine's hair is shot with red-gold, Marion's darker, almost auburn, Peg's dark honey. Their smooth skins are always warmed by the sun, their short arrogant noses are sprinkled with tiny golden freckles. None of them use make-up—beyond a lipstick's quick touch and a pat of powder. Not even Katharine uses it, except for the theatre.

On the bureau in Katharine's room, at Hartford, is her old brown teddy bear. That gives the key to the inside of the house. Her bed is the old maple one of her teens, her chintzes almost exactly like the original ones. The big hall has lots of bare floor—so many feet in tennis shoes, in riding boots, skiing boots, spiked golf shoes, galoshes have clattered over them. The enormous living room has dozens of windows and French doors opening on the garden. Outside, one whole section of the lawn is covered by a big brown canvas marquee. It was put up for Marion's wedding. Everybody loved it, so they just

bought it, and there it stands. But no one lounges idly in its shade. No one, in fact, ever seems to sit down at all, except between fresh dashes into action.

There's a golf course across the back-garden wall, tennis courts right at hand, woods to tramp in . . . and not a day passes without a woods walk. Very hygienic—that's the Doctor's word. More exercise than you'd believe possible, lots of milk. No late hours—but masses of people always, before the war, picnics and dinners and lunches and teas, an endless stream of callers. And at the country house at Fenwick, visitors for weekends, for weeks, for months. (They say that an aunt once found a strange young man scowling at his coffee on the porch at the Fenwick house and suggested helpfully that perhaps he might prefer the *other* hotel farther down the beach.)

The original house at Fenwick washed away in the 1938 hurricane. The new one is a purely Hepburn production. Katharine brought up a set of building blocks from Schwarz. They all sat around and built their house with them. ("My room here, yours across the hall. . . . Mother'd better be on the east. . . . I'm going to have *five* windows this time.") When it was done, all of the tiny white-painted bricks, every door and roof tile in place, they showed it to a builder. He thinks it is a fine house.

There is plenty of room for the visitors, for those Sunday gatherings when fourteen are expected for lunch and twenty arrive. The odd six do not perhaps realize that they're coming just in time for lunch. It may be four o'clock—but lunch may be at four, too . . . or three, or five. Marion or Katharine or Peg will leap up to help the two maids change plates, if the going gets rough. There used always to be a monumental roast of beef, and the Doctor to carve, beaming, teasing the girls, roaring over the story of how he scared Marion's husband nearly to death on his first call by bawling a lecture on late hours over the stairwell, for all the world like Elsie Dinsmore's Papa. But all the while he was shaking with silent laughter. It hasn't been very long that the girls have known that "Pop" was something of an actor. As a Virginian father of three daughters, he felt it was up to him to play a heavy role some-

times, to balance the ultra-progressive influence of their mother. The rages of "Pop" were a parody, they all know it now. They all know everything there is to know about each other. Grant that they're extraordinary; they still are typical of an American college-career tradition that is far too lusty to die out.

# *Ghostly Father, I Confess*

---

*by MARY McCARTHY*

My gostly fader, I me confess,  
First to God and then to you,

That at a window—wot ye how?—  
I stale a kiss of grete sweteness,  
Which don was out of aviseness;  
But it is doon not undoon now.

My gostly fader, I me confess,  
First to God and then to you.

But I restore it shall doutless  
Again, if so be that I mow;  
And that to God I make a vow  
And ells I axe foryefness.  
Gostly fader, I me confess,  
First to God and then to you.

The eyes gleamed benevolently behind the glasses. If she turned her head on the cushion, she could see them, and she kept doing this from time to time, hoping to surprise them in an expression of disapproval, of astonishment or regret—anything but that kindly neutrality. But they did not change, and finally she gave it up, dropped her head back on the cushion, and tried to relax. It was really against the rules (she supposed) to be flopping around there like a fish. He had never scolded her for it; now and then he would say gently, “Don’t worry about what I think. Just let your own thoughts come.”

“I dreamed I was seventeen,” she said, “and I was matriculating at a place called Eggshell College.” She could not resist a teasing smile and another glance up at him. “I must have

dreamed that just to please you. It's custom-made. The womb fantasy."

"Go on with the dream," he said.

"Well," she continued. "There was a sort of an outing cabin. We had one at college. It was supposed to be great fun to spend the weekend in it. I never did. I thought it was silly—you know, a vestigial trace of the goofy old days when they had chafing dishes and spreads and college sings and went to the Cider Mill for a binge. My aunt had the idea that college was still like that," she went on. "She tried to give me an electric doughnut-maker to take away with me when I was a freshman. It was the only present she ever offered me."

She knew without looking that she had coaxed a smile out of him. It was all right, then; she could go on. He understood her attitude toward the outing cabin. Often it was not so easy. She would spend half a session trying to show him, say, that a man they both knew was a ridiculous character, that a movie they had both seen was cheap. And it would be hopeless, absolutely hopeless, for he was that man, he was that movie; he was the outing cabin, the Popular Front, the League of American Writers, the *Nation*, the *Liberal*, the *New Republic*, George S. Kaufman, Helen Hayes, colonial wallpaper, money in the bank, and two cocktails (or was it one?) before dinner. When she had worn herself out, he would remind her patiently, "It doesn't matter what I think, you know." But it did matter, of course. Sometimes it seemed to her that her analysis could never be finished until he could purge himself of the maple furniture in his waiting room, the etching of the Cathedral at Chartres that hung above his desk, the subscription to *Newsweek* that never ran out. Someone had once suggested to her that all this was a matter of policy, that a psychoanalyst in the decoration of his professional quarters aimed deliberately at that colorless objectivity, that rigorous job-lot asceticism that can be seen in its purest form in the residential hotel room.

The notion was pleasant but not really plausible. It was impossible to think of Dr. James as a male Cinderella who lived dangerously every night after office hours, and all day Sundays.

"What are you smiling about?" he asked.

"I'm thinking rude thoughts about you."

Damn my stream of consciousness, her mind said. Why must it keep harping on this embarrassing topic?

"Let's have them," he exclaimed, with that ghastly, hand-regulated cheerfulness that seemed to spurt out of him the more eagerly the more unpleasant were the facts to be faced. To listen to him, you might think that someone had just set a wonderful dinner before him.

"Oh, Dr. James," she sighed. "Let's skip it this time. You know what I think about you. It doesn't give me any pleasure to say it to your face."

"But your picture of me is very important," he said, in his pedagogical manner. "Not for what it says about me, but for what it says about you."

This angered her slightly. So he took no stock in her opinion, labeled it "aggression against the analyst," and dismissed it from his mind. Very well, then. . . .

"I was thinking," she said, "how utterly fantastic it is to imagine you on a tear."

"Don't you suppose I have any fun?" There was a certain wistfulness in the question that must have got in by mistake.

"No doubt you do," she said, "but I bet you have to work awfully hard at it."

"What do you suppose I do for relaxation?"

Relaxation, she thought; there is the key word. There the poor pedant betrays himself.

"Well," she said, "you see about six plays a year. Your wife makes a list of the things that are really worth while, and you check them off one by one. You get the tickets well in advance, and you generally take another couple with you. You never go on the spur of the moment; you never take standing room. Sometimes somebody in your party knows the girl who is playing the ingénue, and then you go backstage afterward. You meet some of the actors and think it's a lot of fun. Once in a while, you go to a benefit concert with your mother or your wife's mother. Myra Hess for the British Relief. You like the movies, and you never miss one that the *New Yorker* recommends. Now and then, if your party is feeling particularly

reckless, you go to a swing-music joint. You're not much of a dancer, but you ask the other guy's wife to dance once; after that you sit out because the floor is too crowded. In the summer you commute to your mother-in-law's place at Larchmont or Riverside. There is a nice crowd of young doctors there, and you kid each other about who is going to go in the water first. Probably there is a certain amount of splashing, but nobody loses his temper, and afterward you play medicine ball on the beach. Your wife likes tennis, but you don't go in for it, on account of your eyes. Your wife has a three-quarter-length silver-fox coat and several very dear girl friends. You take excellent care of your health. You have small feet and are proud of it, and this is your only foible."

"What makes you so sure of all this?"

"It's not magic. I've got a good eye for social types, and I've had a lot of practice. When I was in college, I was a perennial house guest. I never went home for vacations, you know."

She was anxious, now, to change the subject. She had enjoyed doing that malicious portrait, but suddenly toward the end her self-confidence had wavered. Supposing she were wrong? He would not tell her. She would never know. It was like doing an algebra problem and finding that the answers were missing from the back of the book. She felt the ground give way beneath her.

"Nothing I could do would surprise you?" he said.

She began to cry.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Why do you lead me on so? It's not fair! You make me say all these awful things to you, and then you won't even tell me whether I'm right or not."

The tears streamed from her eyes. She opened her pocket-book and found, as usual, no handkerchief. He took a box of Kleenex from a drawer and handed it to her silently.

"Thank you," she said, still sobbing. "Do you keep that specially for me or do all your patients weep?"

He did not answer. He never answered questions of this sort.

"What made you cry?" he said at length, in that falsely

casual tone he used whenever he asked her an important question.

"You made me feel like a fool," she said. "I extended myself and you sat and watched. It was like one of those exposure dreams. You go into a restaurant and you think how beautiful and chic you are. You even pose a little, toss your head, draw off your gloves very, very slowly, like an actress. And then all of a sudden you look down and you see that you have nothing on but a pair of pink pants. And the worst of it is that nobody shows the slightest surprise; there is no commotion; the head-waiter doesn't come and ask you to leave. Everyone goes on eating and talking, so that you think that maybe your eyes have deceived you, and you look stealthily down again, hoping to find your clothes back on. But no; you are still in the same condition.

"Then you try to tell yourself that perhaps nobody has noticed anything, that if you behave very, very quietly and do not call attention to yourself, your lapse will pass unobserved. But all the time you know that this is not true. They are all watching you, but out of cruelty they will give no sign. If one of your companions were to say, 'Why, Meg, you're undressed,' the situation would be saved. You could exclaim, 'Why, gee, I am,' and people would lend you things and laugh and fuss over you, and the whole thing would turn into one of those jolly Embarrassing Moments that readers send in to the *Daily Mirror*. 'Imagine my mortification, but there I was without a stitch of clothes!'

Dr. James laughed.

"Yes," he said. "But what is there about you that you don't want me to see?" He spoke softly now, in the tone of a conspirator in a Grade B movie. "What is it, Meg, that you are ashamed of?"

She pressed her hands wearily to her forehead. If he would give up this whispering, she could forgive everything. It made them both ridiculous. She longed to reply in a sepulchral voice, "Dr. James, when I was a little girl, I buried my four-year-old cousin alive." (Sensation in the courtroom!) "But don't tell anybody." However, these miserable jokes of hers wasted a

great deal of time. She knew exactly what would follow. He would scribble furiously in his notebook for a few seconds, and then the questions would come. Did you ever play with a four-year-old cousin? Did you ever want to bury anybody alive? Where did you get this idea of interment? And so on, through *The Last Days of Pompeii*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, and the giant, whatever his name was, who slept restlessly under Aetna. Matthew Arnold, Empedocles. And Karl Marx: "weighs like an Alp" on the something-or-other.

"Nothing, Dr. James, nothing. There's nothing I ever did that I haven't told you." (But what about the time she had stolen the ring from the five and ten and her aunt had made her take it back and confess to the manager? Could it be that? Oh, surely not, her common sense replied. All children steal, and she had already told him of half a dozen other childish thefts: the cookies from the pantry, the small change from her aunt's bureau, the dime for the collection plate she had spent on candy. Oh, surely not! And yet. . . . What if it were important and she failed to tell him? What if her reluctance to delay over a trifle really masked an unconscious fear? In this game, you never knew whether you were putting obstacles in the way or clearing the path. It was a question of relevance, but how could you determine what was relevant to the Unknown?)

Fortunately, he was speaking and she did not have to decide.

"Understand me," he said. "I don't think it's anything you did. It's a feeling that you have about yourself, a feeling that there is something about you that you have to conceal."

He means sex, she thought with relief. It was not the ring, after all. She could feel her mind wrinkle into a smile. We are heading for the castration complex, she told herself, the horror of the little girl when she discovers that an important part of her is missing.

"I don't believe in it," she said aloud.

"Don't believe in what?"

"All this castration nonsense."

"How do you know I was going to mention that?"

"Weren't you?" She pressed him..

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was." (Ah, she thought, without

pleasure, I can read him like a book.) "But," he continued, "I am not trying to foist this idea on you. It was you who brought it up."

"Oh, Dr. James," she murmured reproachfully. "You turn everything to your own advantage. If I can read your mind, you say that I put the idea there."

"No," he said. "Think! What are the pink pants in your dream there for? What are they hiding?"

She looked up quickly at him, struck by his question, proud of him for having asked it. Perhaps he was not so stupid as she feared.

"It's true," she admitted, "when men have exposure dreams, they're always completely naked. Most women, too. The pink pants are a little idiosyncrasy of my own. Maybe you have something there." She felt suddenly excited and gay. Everything was going to be all right. They were on the scent. The fugitive, criminal self lay hiding in a thicket, but the hounds of the intellect were hot in pursuit. Ah, she thought, thank God for the mind, the chart, the compass. Of course, the universe had to be meaningful. There can be no question without an answer; if you throw a ball up, it must come down. Her life was not mere gibberish; rather, it was like one of those sealed mystery stories where the reader is on his honor not to go beyond a certain page until he has guessed the identity of the murderer. She had come to that imperative blank page again and again and stopped and retraversed her ground, looking for the obvious, unobtrusive clue, the thing that everyone overlooked and that was nevertheless as plain as the nose on your face. "*The Clue of the Pink Pants*," she said to herself. "The publishers take pride in announcing a new kind of detective story by a young author." But, seriously, if that were really it. . . .

Then she could go on. She paused to examine this phrase, the vague, dramatic resonance of it, the hollowness of the two o's echoing in a triumph of onomatopoeia the emptiness of the mind that framed it. It was a phrase that came to her lips a dozen times a day. Bumping along on a Madison Avenue bus, she would find herself hammering her fist on her knees and

crying out to herself in a sort of whispered shriek, "I can't go on, I CANNOT GO ON." And at home, in the apartment on Sutton Place ("not one of the really smart ones, my dear, just one of Vincent Astor's remodeled tenements"), she would suddenly set her fork down on her plate and say to her husband, "I can't go on. Listen to me, Frederick, I can't go on." She would watch the surprise invade his anxious face, the pain, the irritation, the do-we-have-to-go-through-all-this-again, the doubt (tact or brutality, which was the better method?), the desire to get through the meal in peace, the final decision to humor her until the maid brought the coffee in. "Finish your supper, my dear," he would say, calmly, easily, so as not to put pressure on her. In the end, she would pick up her fork again and, with an exaggerated listlessness, begin to eat.

This was what she could not forgive herself: the capitulation. If she had any strength of character, she would commit suicide. But they would never find her body in the river. Ah, no, not she! She knew which side her bread was buttered on. Better a live coward than a dead hero, as her colored maid always said: "Cemetery's full of heroes," she could hear the soft, wicked Negro voice. . . . "Lacedaemonians, shed a tear. . . . *Maestius lacrimis Simonideis.*" The distich of grief was not for her. She remembered how in boarding school, bemused by sad poetry out of an anthology, she had sat half one night with her feet hanging out her window, knowing that she would never have the heart to jump, yet telling herself from moment to moment that of course in five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen, she would. When, at last, she had crept back into her bed, cold and dispirited, the romantic melancholy had blown away, leaving her with a mild depression, for she had in truth seen her own grave, the narrow, schoolgirl's bed with its regulation blanket which she would always, however late, return to. It was characteristic, she thought now, that she had not even caught a cold.

"But why should you have committed suicide?" Dr. James had said. "You reproach yourself unnecessarily." "You have got everything upside down," her husband told her. And from their points of view, they were quite right. Why shouldn't she

finish her dinner, love her husband, have a baby, stay alive? Where was the crime? There was the class crime, to be sure, yet it was not for having money that she hated herself, but (be honest, she murmured) for having some but not enough. If she could have been very rich. . . . It was the ugly cartoon of middle-class life that she detested, Mr. and Mrs., Jiggs and Maggie, the Norths in the *New Yorker*. And the more stylish you tried to make it, smearing it over with culture and good taste, Swedish modern and Paul Klee, the more repellent it became: the cuspidors and the silk lampshades in the funny papers did not stab the heart-half so cruelly as her own glass shelves with the white pots of ivy, her Venetian blinds, her open copy of a novel by Kafka, all the objects that were waiting for her at home, each in its own patina of social anxiety. Ah, God, it was too sad and awful, the endless hide-and-go-seek game one played with the middle class.

If one could only be sure that one did not belong to it, that one was finer, nobler, more aristocratic. The truth was, she hated it shakily from above, not solidly from below, and her proletarian sympathies constituted a sort of snub that she administered to the middle class, just as a really smart woman will outdress her friends by relentlessly underdressing them. Scratch a socialist and you find a snob. The semantic test confirmed this. In the Marxist language, your opponent was always a "parvenu," an "upstart," an "adventurer," a politician was always "cheap," and an opportunist "vulgar." But the proletariat did not talk in such terms; this was the tone of the F.F.V. What the socialist movement did for a man was to allow himself the airs of a marquis without having either his title or his sanity questioned.

No, it was not really the humanitarian side of socialism that touched her. Though she was moved by human misery when it was brought to her attention, if she went to buy a suit at Bonwit Teller, she was never troubled by irrelevant memories of the slums she had passed through on her way. Her aunt had been one of those pious women who could not look at a garbage pail without being reminded of the fact that there were people in the world who had nothing to eat. "It's a sin to throw that

away," she was always saying, and her hyperestheticism on this point allowed her to practice an extreme parsimony with a good conscience. But she herself, thank God, was not like that. In this respect, she took after her father, who in his rather uninspired way had been fond of good cigars, good Bourbon, *eau lilas végétale*, crabmeat, alligator pears, and hotel suites. It was curious, she thought, that all the Puritan penny-pinching should have been on the Catholic side of her family, while her father, that stern Yankee, with his thin skin, his methodical habits, his civic-mindedness, his devout sense of what was proper, should have spent his life buying encyclopedia sets, worthless real estate, patents on fantastic inventions, and have died, to everyone's astonishment, overdrawn at the bank. What a strange childhood she had had! ("No wonder," Dr. James sometimes murmured, in a slightly awestruck voice, "no wonder"—meaning no wonder she had turned out so badly. And it was true, she supposed, Freud would have labored in vain if she had not ended up, sobbing, on a psychoanalyst's blue couch. She was a real Freudian classic, and as such faintly monstrous, improbable, like one of those French plays that demonstrate as if on a blackboard the axioms of the romantic movement. It was not merely a distaste for the obvious that had led both her and the doctor to avoid, insofar as it was possible, lengthy discussions of her childhood. The subject frightened them both, for it suggested to them that the universe is mechanical, utterly predictable, frozen, and this in its own way is quite as terrible as the notion that the universe is chaotic. It is essential for our happiness, she thought, to have both the pattern and the loose ends, to roughen the glassy hexameter with the counter-rhythm of speech.)

Up to the time her mother had died, she had been such an elegant little girl. She remembered her ermine neckpiece and the ermine muff that went with it, her two baby rings with the diamonds in them, the necklace of seed pearls. All a little on the ostentatious side, she admitted, but it had been an era of bad taste. Then, after the flu was over, and mamma did not come home from the hospital, Aunt Clara had moved in, the rings were put in the vault ("to keep for you until you're

older"), the ermine set wore out, the velocipede broke, the white sand darkened in the sandpile, there were prunes and rice pudding on the table, and the pretty little girl who looked (everybody said) so much like her mother was changed into a stringy, bowlegged child with glasses and braces on her teeth, long underwear, high shoes, blue serge jumpers that smelled, and a brown beaver hat two sizes too big for her.

Ah, she said to herself now, I reject this middle-class tragedy, this degenerated Victorian novel where I am Jane Eyre or somebody in Dickens or Kipling or brave little Elsie Dinsmore fainting over the piano. I reject the whole pathos of the changeling, the orphan, the stepchild. I reject this trip down the tunnel of memory which resembles nothing so much as a trip down the Red Mill at Coney Island, with my aunt and her attributive razor strop substituting for Lizzie Borden and her ax. I reject all those tableaux of estrangement: my father in his smoking jacket at the card table with his nightly game of solitaire forever laid out before him, my aunt with her novel by Cardinal Gibbons that she is reading for the fifteenth time, and myself with the cotton handkerchief that I must hem and rehem because the stitches are never small enough; I deny the afternoon I deliver my prize-winning essay at the town auditorium and there is no family there to applaud me because my father is away on a hunting trip, and my aunt, having just beaten me for my error in winning the prize ("You are too stuck-up already"), is at home in her bedroom having hysterics; and also the scene at the summer resort where the lady looks up from the bridge table and utters her immortal tag line, "Surely, Mr. Sargent, this isn't your daughter!" It is all too apropos for acceptance.

Yet what were you going to do? You could not treat your life history as though it were an inferior novel and dismiss it with a snubbing phrase. It had, after all, been like that. Her peculiar tragedy (if she had one) was that her temperament was unable to assimilate her experience; the raw melodrama of those early years was a kind of daily affront to her skeptical, prosaic intelligence. She remembered the White Russian gentleman she had met once at a party. They were asking him about his

escape from the Soviets, and he had reached the point in his story where he saw his brother shot by the Bolsheviks. Here, at the most harrowing moment of his narrative, he faltered, broke off, and finally smiled, an apologetic, self-deprecatory smile which declared, "I know that this is one of the clichés of the Russians in exile. They have all seen their brothers or sisters shot before their eyes. Excuse me, please, for having had such a commonplace and at the same time such an unlikely experience." That terrible smile had filled her with love and pity; she had "recognized" him at once, and afterward on the street she had kissed him, because she, too, knew what it was to have a sense of artistic decorum that like a hoity-toity wife was continually showing one's poor biography the door.

If only she could have been disinherited in some subtle, psychological way. . . . If her alienation from her father could have been expressed in any terms but those crude, shameful ones of food, money, clothes. If that tactless lady's question had not been written quite so large in all the faces she remembered. She had seen it a thousand times, wherever she went with her father, in the eyes of the Pullman porter, the traveling salesman, the waiter in the ladies' annex at the Athletic Club downtown. How she had looked forward to those excursions with him, and how disastrously they had always ended! It was impossible for her to be a credit to him, to be anything but an anomaly, the shabby daughter of a prosperous lawyer, the underbred Irish offspring of a genteel New England parent. Her appearance, her conversation, her appetite—everything was wrong. The sight of a menu would be like a poem to her (buckwheat cakes and country sausage with Real Vermont Maple Syrup); inevitably, she would order too much to eat. But when the food came, her shrunken stomach could not accommodate it: a few bites would instantly bring on that stuffed feeling, and she would set down her fork in despair, seeing the feast on her plate as an image of the Unattainable. Her father never reproved her for this, but each time it happened, his lean face with its prominent lantern jaw would set in sharper lines, and she would know that he was grieved, both on her account and his own. He would have liked to "make it

up to her" for the loneliness, the harsh, antiquated discipline that his sister-in-law had brought into the house, but it was impossible. Aunt Clara could be bodily left at home but her spirit presided over her niece like a grim familiar demon.

In a way, it had been better at home, for there the social and religious differences had been given a kind of spatial definition and it was easier to move about. Upstairs there were red votive lamps, altars, and holy pictures (the Sacred Heart, Veronica's veil with the eyes that followed you about the room, Saint Cecilia in sepia striking a heavenly chord on an anachronistic piano), a rich, emotional decor that made the downstairs with its china shepherdesses, Tiffany glass, bronze smoking sets, and family photographs look matter-of-fact and faded, just as the stories in the *Century* in the magazine rack in the living room seemed unendurably tame after the religious fiction she found in her aunt's favorite periodicals, where people were always being bitten by tarantulas or cobras, struck by lightning, plagued with leprosy or cholera, cursed in the most ingenious and striking ways by an implacable and resourceful God. It was as if the Catholic Church began on the landing, where her father's suite branched off from the stairway that continued on up to her own room, her aunt's room, her mother's empty room with the French perfume slowly evaporating in the silver atomizers on the dressing table. Her father never entered her bedroom (except once, with the doctor, when she was sick), yet she knew that he was fond of her, thought her clever because she got high marks and talked back to the sisters. It was some peculiar delicacy that kept him from intruding, the same delicacy that made him say, "Aunt Clara knows what's good for you."—"You must do what the Mother Superior says."

If he had been truly indifferent to her, she thought, her position would have been more tolerable. She could have set herself to win his love, or fought him as she did her aunt. But she could not win what she had already, and she could not fight him either. For a long time, she believed that perhaps he did not notice, and she began to behave badly in order to attract his attention. She ran away from home and spent the night in a museum, behind a cast of the Laocoön, where an

attendant found her the next day and immediately called a policeman. The idea on the surface of her mind was that she wanted to be put in an orphan asylum, but in the end she confessed her name and allowed herself to be led home, because the thing she really desired was to hear her father say, "Why are you suffering so? Is it so terrible for you here that you honestly cannot stand it?"

When the policeman brought her in, her father's face flushed, and she knew that she had disgraced him. He did not scold her, but neither did he ask any questions. "Get her something to eat," he said to the maid, while the young policeman shuffled his feet, glancing from father to daughter with that expression she was so familiar with, not knowing whether to leave because the case seemed somehow unsolved. She watched his eyes take in the living room. She knew precisely what he was saying to himself. "Good home, nice kid, prominent family, what the hell is the matter here? Maybe I was wrong about the kid. Maybe *she's* the nigger in the woodpile."

And she did not blame the policeman for thinking this. In fact, she expected him to think it. All the way home on the streetcar, seeing him begin to like her, seeing the sympathy spring up (her old man probably beats her), she had known that it was merely a question of time, that as soon as he met her father, a stupid, suspicious look would come over his cop's face, and he would feel a little angry and ridiculous, hurt in his professional pride, as if somebody had picked his pocket. Nevertheless, when he had offered to buy her an ice-cream cone at the drugstore at the end of the car line, she had accepted and gobbled it up quickly, just as later on she would gobble up friendship, love, compliments, with the full pre-sense of what would come afterward, the reproachful look, the averted head, the "You are not what you seemed."

Yet what was she to have done? How explain to the policeman a thing she hardly understood herself, that her father's being a good man was precisely what was the matter, that she was the victim of his conscience, as Isaac nearly was of Abraham's? But here there was no God to step in and say, "That's enough, Mr. Sargent. You have convinced me that you are a

man of honor, that you practice religious tolerance and pay your debt to the dead. You may now give in to your natural feelings and get that woman out of your house." Her father had never liked Aunt Clara. "Your mother," he said once, succinctly, "was cut from a different bolt of cloth." This, she recognized, was for him the sustaining myth, the classic delusion of the frontier, where a pretty woman is a pretty woman, poverty is no crime, and all the nonsense of family and religion and connections has been left behind in the East, and you do not look down on anybody for his race, except of course a Chinaman or a Jap. You do not permit yourself to remember New England and the Irish workers thronging off the boats, the anti-Catholic riots in Boston; you forget your mother, who would draw aside her skirts when a nun passed, and your father with his stack of Know-Nothing pamphlets. If you are to cut down the forests, lay the trolley tracks, send up the skyscrapers, you need partners in business and domesticity, and there is no time to be choosy. You cannot pause to consider that your wife's grandfather is the historical enemy, the jostling, elbowing immigrant whose cheap labor power pushed your own father out into Illinois and sent you as a young man hurrying farther west, where there was still a little space left.

Her mother's youth and beauty had tempered the amalgam. Nobody could have foreseen that she would die and bequeath her husband Aunt Clara, whose complaints, whose tears, whose blue-white mottled complexion would put his egalitarian principles to the severest kind of test. Aunt Clara was, in truth, more than he had bargained for, and a more realistic man would have felt himself perfectly justified in calling the deal off, repossessing his daughter, bringing her up according to his own ideas. Yet the very injustice of the legacy, its unwarranted, unforeseeable character, had moved her father to accept it. The fact that Aunt Clara was personally distasteful to him put her beyond the pale of his criticism, rendered her untouchable, sacred, just as the very real aversion he felt toward Catholic doctrine drove him to punish his daughter if her mark in Catechism was low. She understood this now very well, for she had inherited from him the twisted sense of honor that was

always overpaying its debts, extorting from herself and from others the coin of unnecessary suffering to buy indulgence for a secret guilt, an unacknowledged shame.

Not until she was fifteen, however, did she guess the real nature of her father's sin, and the bitterness of his protracted penance. She saw, then, that to have been locked in closets, beaten, forbidden to read, have a doll, go to the movies or the pantomime was as nothing compared to the agony of permitting these things to happen to your child in the interests of a religious tolerance that you did not really feel.

He had taken her to a dance at the house of one of her cousins. It was her first evening party. She wore a pink moire dress with a big, dark red velvet bow. She was new to the crowd of Irish boys home for Thanksgiving from a prep school, and they kept cutting in and cutting in and bringing her glasses of weak punch from the buffet. Suddenly, her father had shoved his way past her admirers and snatched the glass from her hands. "Get your coat on," he exclaimed in a strange voice, and began to push her toward the door. She was nearly crying when they reached the street, but he took her by the shoulders and shook her. "Damn it," he said, "you ought to have more sense than to let those little micks get you drunk. Can't you see they're trying to make a fool of you?" "Why, Father," she said, "that's not true. They liked me. They thought I was the prettiest girl. . . ." "Stop your nonsense," he shouted. "Don't you know that they're all laughing at you?"

She had walked sullenly along beside him telling herself that it was hopeless, that she would never have a chance to get married if her father was going to act like this. At the same time she had sensed that he was right; there had been something degrading about her success. The boys were awfully common, with their red faces and black hair; the whole party was common. Yet it was strange that her father should have noticed this, for he never made social distinctions. She pondered the word "micks," which came so unexpectedly from him, who had taught her that you must never say nigger or sheeny or dago. All at once she understood; it was as if he had told her the story of his life, and she was both sorry for him

and frightened. In that terrible look on his face, in his hoarse voice, she read the living history of the Irish, the Jews, the Negroes. She felt closer to him than ever before; yet there was no doubt in her mind that her allegiance belonged elsewhere. Let her father vote for Hoover! She was for Al Smith. It would have been pleasanter, of course, if Al Smith had been a gentleman, if the Negroes were not colored, and the Jews were not Jewish. Nevertheless. . . . Her heart quickened with romantic defiance. She shook off her father's arm and stepped proudly into the car.

But by this time she was free. Aunt Clara had been turned into a housekeeper, to whom no one paid any attention, she herself was in her second year at a good boarding school, she had a clothes allowance and charge accounts, took her friends to lunch at the country club, went to the movies and the theatre, and read whatever she pleased. She had lost her faith. That was what had done it. In her first year of high school, she came home from the convent one day and announced that she was an atheist. Her aunt had had a fit of hysterics and sent for the parish priest. Her father had said nothing, but when she refused to go to Mass the following Sunday, he picked her up and carried her out to the car, while she kicked at his legs and screamed. "You can send me there," she kept repeating, "but you can't make me go in." At the Catholic church she declined to get out of the car. The chauffeur drove her around for an hour and then brought her home. "I didn't go," she said.

That night her father called her into the library. "You're old enough now," he said, "to know what you want. I can't make you go to church. I've tried to have you brought up a good Catholic because I thought your mother would want it so. I've let your aunt have her way, though I've told her she was being too strict with you, that there was bound to be an explosion. I can't do any more." He paused. "Are you willing to finish out the year at the convent?" She knew that she must take a strong line. "No," she said firmly. "All right." He smiled for the first time. "You'll have to be tutored then till I can find a good school for you. I don't want you to fall behind." "I won't," she declared intensely, promising herself that she

would repay his confidence in her by having a brilliant career. A great writer, an actress, an ambassador's gifted wife. Perhaps he would like it best if she were to study for the bar. But no, that was out of the question; women lawyers wore flat-heeled shoes. A great lady of some sort who spoke six languages fluently, Diane de Poitiers, Ninon, or Margaret of Navarre.

With a conscious sense of drama, she walked over to the bookshelves and took down *The Queen's Necklace*. Dumas had been forbidden her because he was on the Index. "Can I have this now?" she asked. Her father glanced up at the long line of novels in the worn, burgundy-colored bindings. "I ate those up when I was a boy." She smiled and turned to go. "You can read it in here," he said. "No need to rub it in. Your aunt is going to be pretty upset. You must go easy on her." Her face fell. "You must learn to be a good sport, Meg," he said gently. "It's a poor winner that gloats."

Would she have had the courage, she wondered, to have taken up that extreme position if she had not known, unconsciously, that deep down in his soul her father was cheering her on? She was not sure. "You must stop belittling yourself," said Dr. James. "It doesn't make any difference what you would have done under some different circumstances. The fact is that you did the best you could with the circumstances you had. Anybody on the outside would say you acted very bravely." Ah, yes, she thought, but again you miss the point. It had not been a real test. That was what she feared and desired; the real test, the ordeal, the burning tenement house with the baby asleep on the fifth floor (would you rush in and save it if there were absolutely no one looking, no God in heaven to welcome your charred but purified spirit, no newspaper account the next day, YOUNG WOMAN DIES SAVING SLUM CHILD; if there were nothing in the world but you and the baby and the fire, would you not say to yourself that it was undoubtedly too late, that the baby must already have suffocated, that the fire was not serious, that the baby was not there at all but in the house across the street?). And of course, as Dr. James said, life is not like that. In life there is always the mitigating

circumstance: "Conditions were not right yesterday for the experiment that was to have been performed."—"Findings of observers are open to serious question because of the cloudiness of the atmosphere." Yet actually all this is misleading; the details, the environmental factors, the conflicting accounts of witnesses serve merely to obscure the fact that the question has been put, is being put, will be put, but worded so ambiguously, tucked into such an innocent context, that the subject cannot learn whether or not he had taken the test, let alone what his mark is. It therefore becomes important—for the subject who is interested in his status (there are many who simply don't care and doubtless they are the ones who graduate *summa cum laude*)—to examine the data of his life with the utmost severity and cunning, turning the facts every which way, side-ward, upside down, as one turned those old newspaper puzzles to find the face in the cloud.

In her own case, appearances were certainly against her. (Don't look now but isn't she the girl who stirred up all that trouble a few years ago? Treated her husband so badly he drove his car off that cliff. Of course, he was drunk and luckily he wasn't hurt, but still. . . . And then that other guy—what was his name?—she worked on him till he left his wife and then wouldn't have anything to do with him. And there was another story . . . he was sick and she didn't go to see him. . . . The time she made poor so-and-so quit his job on that Foundation because it wasn't radical enough to suit her. . . . Got them to introduce her to some publishers and then dropped them like a hotcake. . . . Her best friend. . . . Now she's married to that architect, you know the one, that does those houses with ramps. . . . I guess she's got what she wants, but they fight like cats and dogs. . . .) A shady case unquestionably, a sordid history of betrayal. Yet, in some way, she was not like that. She would look at her face in the mirror and recognize in her features something direct, candid, sincere, some inward innocence engraved there that made strangers trust her on sight, tell her their troubles, ask her to watch their babies, help her carry her parcels. Policemen and taxi drivers smiled at her, truck drivers laughed at her hats. There it was, the un-

reasonable vote of confidence, which was not quite unearned. She would be, she felt, half entitled to it so long as she refused to become reconciled with herself, so long as the right hand remained on guard, the angry watchdog of the left. Yet in Dr. James's eyes all this was sheer folly.

"Accept yourself as you are," he said. "Stop trying to dig into your motives. You have set yourself a moral standard that nobody could live up to. Your early religious training. . . ." Ah, dear, she thought, how they all deplore my early religious training. "For God's sake," her husband said, "give up worrying about your imaginary sins and try to behave decently. You use your wonderful scruples as an excuse for acting like a slut. Instead of telling yourself that you oughtn't to have married me, you might concentrate on being a good wife." "But I do try," she said sadly. "I really do." "Oh, hell," he said, "you overdo it or you underdo it. One day you're a miracle of a woman and the next morning you're a hellcat. Why do we have to live like that? Why can't you be like anybody else?"

That was what he had sent her to the doctor for—a perfectly simple little operation. First comes the anesthetic, the sweet, optimistic laughing gas of science (you are not bad, you are merely unhappy, the bathtub murderer is "sick," the Dead End Kid is a problem child, poor Hitler is a paranoiac, and that dirty fornication in a hotel room, why, that, dear Miss Sargent, is a "relationship"). After consciousness has been put to sleep, it is a very easy matter (just look the other way, please; it isn't going to hurt, but the sight of the instruments seems to disturb excitable people like yourself), it is a very easy matter to cut out the festering conscience, which was of no use to you at all, and was only making you suffer.

Then the patient takes a short rest and emerges as a cured neurotic; the personality has vanished, but otherwise he is perfectly normal; he never drinks too much or beats his wife or sleeps with the wrong person. He has returned to the Garden of Eden, the apple is back on the tree, the snake is a sportive phallus. If there is something a little bewildered, a little pathetic about this *revenant*, it is only that the ancestral para-

dise is, like all the homes of our childhood, smaller than he remembered.

Already, in her own case, the effects of treatment were noticeable. "You have lost those unnatural high spirits," her friends told her. "You are not so tense as you used to be. You don't get so excited about causes." It was true, she was more subdued; she did not assert herself in company; she let her husband talk on his own subjects, in his own vein; she told white lies, where before she had only told black ones. She learned to suppress the unpleasant unnecessary truths: why let an author know that you do not like his book, why spoil a party by getting into an argument, why not tell your friend that her ugly house is pretty? And why mention to your husband that you have spent too much money on an evening dress, gone to the races and lost, had too much to drink, let a man kiss you in the pantry? Pay your debt with the house-keeping money, take your mother's bracelet to the pawnshop, stifle the hangover with benzedrine, say the ice tray stuck and you were a long time getting it out. Do, in other words, what every normal wife does, agree and go your own way (it would only upset him if he knew; it is not important anyway; he would think I was silly to mention it). And if you want the last chop on the plate, the last drink in the bottle, take it, do not force it on him merely because you want it so much—that would simply be making a nuisance of yourself. Stop trying to be fair; only a child insists that everything should be divided equally. Grab whatever you need; he will do the same to you.

What Frederick had not foreseen was that the good would vanish with the bad, that man may easily overreach himself in making provisions for his comfort. His situation was like that of a woman who gets a hat altered to suit her features. It is only a small adjustment, the crown is lowered or heightened, the rakish feather is removed; there is no longer any fault to be found, but the customer looks in the mirror and weeps for her folly, because the hat is no longer stylish. Moreover, it is not returnable; it must lie in the closet for a certain number of seasons, till it is old enough to be given to a charity. And she herself was not returnable either. She could no longer go back

into circulation, as she had done so often before. The little apartment in the Village, the cocktail parties, the search for a job, the loneliness, the harum-scarum Bohemian habits, all this was now unthinkable for her. She had lost the life-giving illusion, the sense of the clean slate, the I-will-start-all-over-and-this-time-it-is-going-to-be-different.

Up to the day that Frederick had sent her to the doctor, she had believed herself indestructible. Now she regarded herself as a brittle piece of porcelain. Between the two of them, they had taught her the fine art of self-pity. "Take it easy," "Don't try to do too much," "You are only human, you know," "Have a drink or an aspirin, lie down, you are overstrained." In other words, you are a poor, unfortunate girl who was badly treated in her childhood, and the world owes you something. And there is the corollary: you must not venture outside this comfortable hospital room we have arranged for you, see how homey it is, the striped curtains, the gay bedspread, the easy chair with the reading lamp, why, you would hardly know it was a hospital—BUT (the threat lay in the conjunction), don't try to get up, you are not strong enough; if you managed to evade the floor nurses, you would be sure to collapse in the street.

Certainly, Frederick could not have intended this. He had sent her to Dr. James because he was unimaginative, because he believed in science in the same way that as an architect he believed in model tenement houses and slum-clearance projects and the Garden City of the Future, which would have straight streets, and lots of fresh air and parks of culture and rest. When she had wept and cursed and kicked at him, he had not known how to "cope with" her (the phrase was his), and out of timidity, out of a certain sluggishness, an unwillingness to be disturbed, to take too much spiritual trouble, he had done what the modern, liberal man inevitably does—called in an expert.

How characteristic of him, she thought, smiling, this great builder of cities, who cannot fix a leaky faucet! Poor Frederick, she murmured to herself, he did not see it in the cards at all that his spirited termagant of a wife would be converted into a whimpering invalid who no longer raged at him so often, who no longer wept every morning and seldom threatened to

kill him, but who complained, stood on her prerogatives, and was chronically, vocally tired. And yet. . . . Perhaps he had seen it, and accepted it as a lesser evil to living with her on terms of equality or allowing her to leave him. He was always talking about what he called her "bad record," a divorce, three broken engagements, a whole series of love affairs abandoned *in medias res*. Perhaps what counted for him more than anything else, more than love (did he love her, did he know what love was all about?), more than a stable household with a pretty wife across the dinner table, was that this should not happen to him, that no one should be able to say, "Well, she's done it again." Furthermore, the fact of her illness, a fact she could not talk away, since she went to the doctor daily, this fact was invaluable to him as a weapon in their disputes. He was always in a position to say to her, "You are excited, you don't know what you are saying," "You are not a fit judge of this because you are neurotic," "We won't discuss this further, you are not sane on the subject," and "I don't want you to see your old friends because they play into your morbid tendencies." And under the pressure of this, her own sense of truth was weakening. This and her wonderful scruples were all she had in the world, and both were slipping away from her. Overcome by the pathos of her situation, she began to cry.

Dr. James, who was still talking about castration, stopped in the middle of a sentence.

"What is it?" he said. "What upset you?" He had his notebook ready.

"I wasn't listening," she said, knowing this was not quite accurate. She *had* heard him, but the mind's time is quicker than the tongue's. Through the interstices of one of his measured paragraphs her whole life could flood in. "Everything you tell me may be true, but it's irrelevant. Supposing at a certain time in my life, a time I can't remember, I found out that girls were different from boys. No doubt this was a very poignant moment, but I can't go back to it. My horrors are in the present."

"But you have never learned to accept that difference."

"Ah," she said, "now you are on Frederick's side. You think

I ought to welcome my womanly role in life, keep up his position, defer to him, tell him how wonderful he is, pick up the crumbs from his table and eat them in the kitchen."

"No," he said, "no. You have a lot to contend with. The marriage is not ideal. It's unfortunate, for one thing, that you should have chosen to marry exactly the kind of man who would make you feel most enslaved and helpless."

"Feel!" she replied indignantly.

"Well," he said in his most reasonable and optimistic manner, "you could always get away from him. I think you want to stay with him. I think you are fond of him and that the two of you have the possibility of a solid relationship. Mutual interests . . . you could have children . . . you can't keep on the way you were going, flying from one hectic love affair to another."

"No," she said ruefully, "you can't."

If one only could. . . . But it required strength. It took it out of one so. The romantic life had been too hard for her. In morals as in politics anarchy is not for the weak. The small state, racked by internal dissension, invites the foreign conqueror. Proscription, martial law, the billeting of the rude troops, the tax collector, the unjust judge, anything at all, is sweeter than responsibility. The dictator is also the scapegoat; in assuming absolute authority, he assumes absolute guilt; and the oppressed masses, groaning under the yoke, know themselves to be innocent as lambs, while they pray hypocritically for deliverance. Frederick imagined that she had married him for security (this was one of the troubles between them), but what he did not understand was that security from the telephone company or the grocer was as nothing compared to the other security he gave her, the security from being perpetually in the wrong, and that she would have eaten bread and water, if necessary, in order to be kept in jail.

To know God and yet do evil, this was the very essence of the romantic life, a kind of electrolytical process in which the cathode and the anode act and react upon each other to ionize the soul. And, as they said, it could not go on. If you cannot stop doing evil, you must try to forget about God. If your eyes

are bigger than your stomach, by all means put one of them out. Learn to measure your capacities, never undertake more than you can do, then no one will know that you are a failure, you will not even know it yourself. If you cannot love, stop attempting it, for in each attempt you will only reveal your poverty, and every bed you have ever slept in will commemorate a battle lost. The betrayer is always the debtor; at best, he can only work out in remorse his deficit of love, until remorse itself becomes love's humble, shamefaced proxy. The two she had cared for most (or was it that they had cared most for her?) had, she believed, understood all this during those last hours when the packed trunks stood about the room and the last pound of butter got soft in the defrosting icebox (it seemed a pity to waste it, but what were you going to do?). They had consoled her and petted her and promised that she would be happy, that she would soon forget them—just as if they had been leaving her, instead of the other way around. The most curious thing about it was that their wounds, whose seriousness perhaps she had exaggerated, had been readily healed by time, while her own, being self-inflicted, continued to pain her. There are other girls in the world, but there is only the single self.

She remembered Frederick's impatience when she had tried to explain this to him. "You couldn't have cared much for him or you wouldn't have wanted to leave him," he had said in a grumpy voice. "Really, Frederick," she had answered, "can't you possibly understand . . . ?" "By their fruits ye shall know them," he replied, sententiously. This was one of his favorite quotations, a quotation which, of course, damned her utterly. Yet, she said to herself now, be fair. This is precisely what you want, to be condemned but condemned unjustly, on circumstantial evidence, so that you can feel that there is still some hope for you, that the very illegality of the proceedings against you will advance your cause in some higher court. The prisoner has been under duress; she has been treated with great harshness; let me show you, your honor, the marks of the cat-o'-nine-tails. It was for his incomprehension, his blunt severity, his egoism, that she had married Frederick in the first place. She had known from the very beginning that he would never really

love her, and this was what had counted for her, far more than the security or the social position.

Or rather perhaps she had felt that she was free to accept these things because the gift of love was lacking. When that man on the train had offered them to her she had had to refuse because love had been offered with them. And yet, she thought, she was being unfair again, for she would never under any conditions have married the man on the train, while there had been something about Frederick (the so-called mutual interests, a certain genuine solidity of character of which the mulishness was only one aspect) that had made her marry him and even believe for a short while that surely it would turn out well, that this time she would be happy and good, that a strong, successful architect was exactly what the recipe called for. An architect, she said to herself scornfully, the perfect compromise candidate, something halfway between a businessman and an artist.

"What you don't see, Dr. James, is that I was better then than I am now. You and Frederick do wrong to be so deeply shocked by my past. Why, if I forget to send out his laundry, he can't resist reminding me of my former sexual crimes. 'You always were a slut,' he says."

"Come now," said Dr. James. "Don't take it so hard. He doesn't mean everything he says, any more than you do."

"Ah," she exclaimed, sitting up, "but he thinks he does. I still know when I lie, I can recognize a frame-up when I make one. But Frederick is his own stooge, his own innocent front. He has a vested interest in himself. He is the perfect Protestant pragmatist. 'If I say this, it is true.' 'If I do this, it is justified.' There is no possibility of dispute because Frederick has grace, Frederick belongs to the Elect. It's the religion of the Pharisee, the religion of the businessman. It's no accident that Catholicism is the religion of the proletariat and of what is left of the feudal aristocracy. Our principles are democratic; we believe that original sin is given to all and grace is offered with it. The poor man is democratic out of necessity, the nobleman is democratic out of freedom. Have you ever noticed," she went on, forgetting her quarrel with Frederick, warming up to her sub-

ject, "that the unconscious hypocrite is a pure middle-class type? Your aristocrat may be a villain, and your beggar may be a criminal; neither is self-deluded, puffed up with philanthropism and vanity, like a Rockefeller or an Andrew Carnegie. And the French, who are the most middle-class people in the world, have produced satirical literature that is absolutely obsessed with this vice."

Dr. James frowned slightly. It was plain that the subject did not interest him. If only her analysis could be kept on the plane of intellectual discussion! But with Dr. James this was out of the question. Whenever she did manage it, she was sorry almost at once for, divested of professional infallibility, Dr. James was a pitiable sight. He was no match for her in an argument. It was murder, as they said in the prize ring. And the brief pleasure she got from showing herself to advantage (now he sees me at my best) curdled quickly into self-contempt, as she perceived how abject indeed was her condition, if she could allow this blundering sophomore to get his hands on her beautiful psychology.

Would she have done better, she wondered, to have gone to one of the refugee analysts, or to one of the older men like Brill? Many of them were intelligent, and they had another merit, they were peculiar. You could see at a glance why psychoanalysis had attracted them. They suffered from migraine, divorced their wives, committed suicide, bullied their patients, quarreled with their colleagues; they were vain or absent-minded or bitter or dishonest—there was hardly a one of whom it could not be said, "Physician, heal thyself." And popular opinion was wrong when it held that an analyst's personal failings disqualified him as a healer. Psychoanalysis was one of those specialized walks of life, like the ballet or crime or the circus, in which a deformity is an asset; a tendency to put on weight is no handicap to a professional fat lady; moral idiocy is invaluable to a gangster, and the tragedy of a midget's life occurs when he begins to grow. What Dr. James and his young American colleagues lacked was, precisely, the mark of Cain, that passport to the wilderness of neurosis that the medical schools do not supply.

Yet for all their insight and cultivation, the others, the marked men, were dangerous. They might give you their own neurosis; they might neglect you or die or go insane or run away with their stenographers, and then where would you be? With Dr. James you were safe. He might never cure you, but he would not kill you. He would try to make up in conscientiousness and sympathy what he lacked in the other departments. Whatever you did or said, he would be unfailingly kind, and now and then in his blue eyes you would see a small, bright flame of pain, which told you that he was suffering with you, that you were not alone. And if, in many ways, he seemed Frederick's ideal apostolic delegate (for Frederick would have been afraid to have you go to one of those showy, gifted analysts), if he seemed a symbol of compromise, of the mediocrity you were rapidly achieving, you must forgive him, pretend not to notice, since he was all you had left. Your father was dead, your first husband, your first lover, and your next-to-the-last, even your Aunt Clara. Your other lovers were married, your friends were scattered or disgusted with you or on bad terms with Frederick.

One reason, it occurred to her suddenly, that she continued to go to Dr. James long after she had admitted that he could do nothing for her was simply, if the truth were acknowledged, that she had no one else to talk to. Her conversation had become official conversation—the war, the Administration, the Managerial Revolution, Van Wyck Brooks, Lewis Mumford, the latest novel by a friend. Even on these public subjects, Frederick did not like it if she was too “sharp,” and she could never guess ahead of time whether he would laugh uproariously at one of her jokes or rebuke her for a want of taste. Frederick, she thought, must have known that with all the will in the world she could not transform herself overnight into a “public” character like himself, that a certain amount of isolation was desirable but too much might bring on revolt. Dr. James was the Outlet, paid for by the month, the hygienic pipe line that kept the boiler from exploding.

“Let's go back a little,” he said now. “It made you angry when I told you that you felt enslaved. Understand me, I don't

mean that this is a delusion. It's true that you've put yourself in a position that isn't easy to retreat from. You have gone and burnt all the bridges that could take you back to your old life. But you have done this on purpose." She nodded.

"I asked for it all right," she said bitterly. "I haven't any call to blame Frederick. It's my own cowardice that got me into this, and it's my own cowardice that'll keep me there. Every time I say to myself that I can't go on, it's a lie. Or maybe it's a kind of prayer. 'Let me not go on.' "

"Wait!" He sustained a dramatic pause. In this moment he was very much the magician. Behind him you could see Mesmer and then Cagliostro, the whole train of illusionists, divine, disreputable charlatans, who breathe on the lead coin, and, lo, it is purest gold. In spite of herself, she felt a little excited. Her hands trembled, her breathing quickened. She was ready for the mystery. "I am going to suggest to you a different view of your marriage." He paused again. Now she hung ardently on his words. She would have liked a cigarette, but she was afraid to reach for her pocketbook, lest the movement disturb him. She held her body perfectly still, like a woman who is expecting that any minute now the man by her side will kiss her.

"Yes?" she said in a soft, weak voice.

"You accuse yourself every day of having done something cowardly in marrying your present husband. I want to suggest to you that the exact opposite may be true, that this marriage took more real daring on your part than anything you have done since you left your father's house."

"You're crazy," she said, mildly.

"No!" he declared. "Think! In your childhood you had a terrible experience. Your mother died and you found yourself the prisoner of a cruel and heartless relative."

"She wasn't really cruel," she protested. "She was just misguided."

"I am talking about the way it appeared to you. Your aunt was the wicked stepmother that you read about in the fairy tales. Now where could you turn for help? To your father,

obviously. But your father refused to help you. He even refused to notice that anything was wrong."

"He was away a great deal."

"That was what you told yourself. You began by trying to excuse him, but all the time you had the feeling that there was something queer going on, something you couldn't understand. Maybe your father and your aunt had a horrible covenant between them, maybe your own subjection was somehow part of the deal."

He is trying to imitate the way I talk, she thought, but it sounds silly when he does it.

"At the same time, you suspected that you would have been treated differently if you were a boy. You've described the arrangement of your house to me, and you lived in a kind of harem. Your father never went into your bedroom. You began to think that there was something ugly about being a girl and that you were being punished for it."

"Yes. There was something odd there. It seems to me now that my father felt that he had committed a sexual crime in marrying outside the clan. Race pollution. That was why he was so strict with me about boys. He wouldn't let me walk down the street—in broad daylight—with a boy I'd known all my life. The temptations of the flesh must have seemed very lively to him."

"We can't go into your father's psychology here. Something like that probably happened. In any case, you were made to feel unclean about your sex. And your religion got into the picture. You compared the upstairs with the downstairs."

Ah, yes, she thought, you are right. How schematically it had all been lived out, the war between the flesh and the spirit, between women and men, between the verminous proletariat and the disinfected bourgeoisie.

"You thought that you belonged with your Aunt Clara, that you were a dark, disgusting person, and that your father, though you could not acknowledge this, was the real jailer."

"I see," she said. "And I felt that I deserved my imprisonment, that my father in segregating me from the community

was performing a social service, throwing a *cordon sanitaire* around a slum section that was full of typhus."

It was all true. Yet there had been some ambiguity in the situation, arising from the fact that she was, after all, her father's daughter. Yet this element, far from easing her lot, had made it the more intolerable. The ugly duckling might be able to get along in life, adjust, resign itself, if there were not the charming, tantalizing possibility that at any moment it might turn into a swan. And, of course, that was what had happened. The second transformation had been quite as magical as the first. The little girl who looked like her mother had suddenly reappeared, seven years older, but otherwise unchanged. Or so, at any rate, it had seemed. She was pretty, she dressed expensively, she was gay, she made friends, and the only remarkable thing about her was that she had the air of coming from nowhere, of having no past. Her classmates in boarding school could not understand why they had never met her before. When they asked her about this, she would blush and say that her father had kept her in a convent. Questions of this sort annoyed her, for she was anxious to think of herself as a completely new person. If anyone would have believed her, she would have pretended that she had spent her former life in some different, distant city, where she had gone to dancing class every Tuesday and been just like everyone else. Unfortunately, her father was too well known; her lie would have been discovered. In a way, she supposed, it was to escape from these questions, from the whole unfair business of having to have a verifiable history, that she had gone East to college. There, if you had money and used the right fork, no one could suspect an Aunt Clara in your vague but impeccable background. Later, when she had grown more sophisticated, Aunt Clara had been converted into an asset. It was amusing to have an aunt who said "ain't" and ate her peas with a spoon, amusing because it seemed so improbable that you could have an aunt like that.

Moreover, the change had not been merely superficial. Her whole character had altered, or, rather, she had believed that it had. She, who had spent seven years in crying fits, spent the

next seven without shedding a tear. Where her artistic tastes had been romantic, they quickly became realistic. Everything she had formerly admired became detestable to her. The sight of a nasturtium or a pink cosmos could make her tremble with anger, though these were the very flowers that, at her aunt's suggestion, she had chosen to grow as a child. Most extraordinary of all, she had suddenly developed wit and, even now, she never failed to be surprised when people laughed at her jokes, because for years it had been a household axiom that poor Meg had no sense of humor.

How remarkable it had all been! How very strong she had felt! She used to think back over her childhood and marvel, telling herself that it was really extraordinary that "all that" had not left a single trace. Yet as soon as she had married for the first time, she had begun to change back again. The first time she cried, she had said to herself, "This is very strange. I never cry." The first time she got angry with her husband and heard a torrent of abuse pour from her own lips, she had listened to herself in astonishment, feeling that there was something familiar about the hysterical declamatory tone, something she could not quite place. It happened again and again, and always there was this sense of recognition, this feeling that she was only repeating combinations of words she had memorized long ago. She had been married some time before she knew that she sounded exactly like Aunt Clara. Yet she could not stop, she was powerless to intervene when this alien personality would start on one of its tirades, or when it would weep or lie in bed in the morning, too wretched to get up. And when it began to have love affairs, to go up to strange hotel rooms, and try to avoid the floor clerk, she could only stand by, horrified, like a spectator at a play who, as the plot approaches its tragic crisis, longs to jump on the stage and clear up the misunderstanding, but who composes himself by saying that what is happening is not real, those people are only actors.

"This isn't like you, Meg," her first husband would tell her, in that gentle voice of his, and she would collapse in his arms, sobbing, "I know, I know, I know." She was inconsolable, but he would almost console her, since he shared her own incre-

dulity and terror. It was as if she had lent her house to a family of squatters and returned to find the crockery broken, the paneling full of bullet holes, the walls defaced with obscenities, her beautiful, young girl's bedroom splashed with the filth of a dog. And it was as if he had taken her hand and said, "Don't look at it. Come away now. Everything will be just the same; we will send for the cleaning woman, the house painter, and the restorer. Don't cry, it has no connection with you." She was glad to believe in him, naturally. Nevertheless, before long, she began to think him a fool.

At the outset, it had seemed to her that he was right, that she was being impersonated by some false Florimell; however, as time went on, she herself became confused. She was losing the thread of the story, which was getting fearfully involved, like one of those Elizabethan dramas in which the characters change their disguises so often (*Enter the Friar disguised as a Friar*) that the final unmasking leaves everyone more perplexed than before. She came at last to the place where she wondered whether the false self was not the true one. What if she were an impostor? The point could only be settled by producing the false self in all its malignancy, and asserting its claim to belief. To say, "You were wrong about me, look how dreadfully I can treat you, and do it not impulsively but calmly, in the full possession of my faculties." Her first husband, however, had not been convinced. (And how could he be, she thought now; it was far easier for him to believe in her innate, untarnishable virtue than to believe that for three years he had been the dupe of what her present husband called a natural-born bitch.) He had grieved over her and let her go, remarking only that her fiancé would never understand her as he did, that she must be out of her senses.

At once she was restored to herself. She knew that she did not cry or make disgusting scenes or have cheap tastes or commit adultery (unless she were very much in love). Yet whenever a new love affair grew serious the usurper would crowd in again. Each time she would persuade herself that with this particular man her defenses would be impregnable, and each time the weak point, the crumbling masonry, would be dis-

covered too late, when the enemy was in occupation. And she would reflect sadly that of course she ought to have realized that this one was too selfish, that one too lazy, the other too pliant to permit her being herself, though actually it was these very qualities that she had relied upon for protection. And unfortunately she had used very little realism in her selections. She was not in a position to ask herself any of the conventional questions (are our tastes congenial, will he be able to support me, will I still want to sleep with him after the first few weeks?) because precisely what she dared not look into was the Medusa face of the future. "I will have to take a chance," she would always say, and her friends, marveling at her recklessness, did not see that she was exactly as gallant as a soldier who moves forward flourishing the standard, because he knows that if he does not do so, his officers will shoot him in the back.

"Now," said Dr. James, "you were helpless, you had no one to turn to, not even the Juvenile Court. And yet . . ." He paused again, even more impressively. This is the moment, she said to herself. This time surely he will get that rabbit out of the hat. "You won your freedom. And the thing to remember, Margaret," he pronounced her full name with all its syllables, "is that you did it yourself!" His voice was full of triumph.

"Perhaps," she said sadly. "But I can't do it again."

"I think you can," he answered. She felt belief stir, faintly, fondly, within her. It would be nice if he were right. However, the whole tone of his address was so deplorably Y.M.C.A. "I think you can," he repeated. "The very fact of your marriage indicates that you can."

She looked up at him. At last he had surprised her.

"Let me suggest to you, Margaret, that this ordeal of your childhood has been the controlling factor of your life. You forgot it, blotted it out of your consciousness, just as you blotted your aunt out of your family history, yet you have never ceased to think about it for a single moment. You did not understand how you had escaped, you could never really believe that you had. Everything that happened afterward seemed unreal to you, like a story, but you disguised this from yourself by turning everything upside down, by pretending that your child-

hood was the fantasy, the thing that never took place. Nevertheless, as you grew older, as you found yourself able to get along, to graduate with honors, have friends and a husband and a job, as you began to feel more secure in your role, the past reasserted itself. This could not have taken place earlier because you were still too frightened. When it did come out, however, it expressed itself in various ways, not all of them bad. It expressed itself in neurotic symptoms, but also in your political beliefs, in a taste for colorful language that has been useful to you as a writer. It expressed itself in what you call emotional greediness, which has done you good as well as harm.

“As soon as the past showed itself, you tried to run away. At the same time you set yourself various tests to find out what you were like. None of the results appeared to be conclusive, though, because the tests did not seem to you real. What you were being drawn toward all the time was a reenactment of the old situation, but your first marriage and your other relationships fulfilled practically none of the conditions that had prevailed in your father’s house. And the essential thing was lacking: you felt free; you were an equal; you could always get away. You say that you were happier in these relationships. In the end, though, they proved unsatisfactory. You dropped them abruptly. However, as you ~~grew~~ older and—you must not forget this—stronger, you began to choose men who more nearly resembled your father. A middle-aged man, married men, even, once, a New Englander who came from your father’s home state.”

“That was nothing,” she said. “A flash in the pan. One afternoon.”

“Yes. All these affairs are mere signposts of a direction. Finally, however, your father dies, and you are free to make a real marriage. You at once marry Frederick and imitate, as much as it’s possible for a grown woman, your own predicament as a child. You lock yourself up again, you break with your former friends, you quit your job; in other words, you cut yourself off completely. You even put your money in his bank account. You are alone: if you cry out, no one will listen;

if you explain, no one will believe you. Frederick's own weaknesses contribute to this picture; they affirm its reality. His own insecurity makes him tyrannical and overpossessive; his fear of emotional expenditure makes him apparently indifferent. On the one hand, he is unjust to you, like your aunt; on the other, like your father, he pretends not to notice your sufferings and to deny his own culpability in them. Religion appears again, but now (this is very significant) it is the Protestant religion. A doctor enters the scene. If I remember rightly, you say that the only time your father came into your bedroom, he was bringing a doctor with him."

She nodded, unable to speak.

"You reproach yourself with cowardice for having contracted this marriage. But look at the facts. Isn't this the most dangerous action you have ever performed as an adult? You have run a terrible risk, the risk of severe neurosis, in putting yourself to this test. For that's the thing you are asking: Will I be able to get out? And once again you have the answer in yourself."

"No, I haven't," she said. "I'm turned to water. I'm finished. I'm overrun by barbarian tribes. Two or three years ago, perhaps. . . . Not now."

"Two or three years ago, Margaret," he said gently, "you wouldn't have had the courage to put yourself in this situation, let alone to save yourself."

"It's not true. I was wonderful then."

He smiled.

"In those days, you were avoiding the things you feared. Now you are eating breakfast with them."

"Not eating breakfast," she said. "Frederick prefers to breakfast alone. I disturb his train of thought."

"The weakness you feel is a result of living with these fears. You must find your way out, and you'll discover that you are just as strong as Frederick."

"But what can I do? He won't allow me to leave him. I have nobody left to borrow money from. I could run away and sleep on a park bench, I suppose."

But she did not want that. Ah, no! The days of romantic

destitution were gone for her. It was no longer possible for her to conceive of herself as a ribbon clerk at Macy's. Now there was not so much time left in the world that you could spend two years or three in the unrewarding occupation of keeping yourself alive. Her apprenticeship was finished. If she took a job, it would have to be a good one, one that would keep the talents limber. No more secretarial work, no more office routine, that wonderful, narcotic routine that anesthetizes the spirit, lulls the mind to sleep with the cruel paranoiac delusion of the importance, the value to humanity, of the humble-task-well-done.

"You tried running away as a little girl, and it didn't work," he said. "No. You misunderstand me. I'm not advising you to leave Frederick. You must win your freedom from him, your right to your opinions, your tastes, your friends, your money. And, of course, your right to leave him. Once you have it, I believe, you will cease to want to exercise it. You can become truly reconciled with Frederick, and you may even be happy with him."

"It sounds impractical," she said. "How am I going to get these rights?"

"You did before," he answered. "You did it with your mind. That and your beauty are the two weapons you have."

He closed his black notebook.

"All right!" he announced in a totally different voice, high and unnaturally sprightly, as if he were giving a bird imitation. The hour was over. She looked at the electric clock. He had given her five minutes extra. This pleased her, and she was ashamed of being pleased over such a small, such a niggardly present. What a pass, indeed, she had come to when the favors of this commonplace little doctor could be treasured, like autumn leaves in a memory book! The knife of terror struck at her, and she saw herself as a transient, and this office with its white walls as the last and bleakest hotel room she would ever lie in. Guests who stay after one P.M. will be expected to pay for the extra day. When she was gone, he would empty the ash tray, smooth out the white cloth on the pillow, open the

window for an instant, and the room and he would be blank again, ready for the next derelict.

She put her hat on carefully, trying not to hurry, lest he see how humble and rejected she felt, how willing to be dislodged; and trying, on the other hand, not to take too much time, lest he think her inconsiderate. He picked up her coat from the end of the couch and held it out for her, an attention he rarely paid her. She glanced at him and quickly lowered her eyes. Does he think I am unusually upset today, she wondered. Or was it something else? "My beauty," she murmured to herself. "Well, well!" She slid her arms into the coat. She turned, and he offered her his hand. In slight confusion, she shook it. "Good-by," she said softly. He patted her arm. "Good-by," he said in a rather solicitous voice. He held the door open for her and she slid out awkwardly, half running, not wanting him to see her blush.

On the street, she felt very happy. "He likes me," she thought, "he likes me the best." She walked dreamily down Madison Avenue, smiling, and the passers-by smiled back at her. I look like a girl in love, she thought; it is absurd. And yet what a fine rehabilitation of character that had been! The most dangerous action . . . run a terrible risk. She repeated these phrases to herself, as if they had been words of endearment. I think you can. . . . Suddenly, her heart turned over. She shuddered. It had all been a therapeutic lie. There was no use talking. She knew. The mind was powerless to save her. Only a man. . . . She was under a terrible enchantment, like the beleaguered princesses in the fairy tales. The thorny hedge had grown up about her castle so that the turrets could hardly be seen, the road was thick with brambles; was it still conceivable that the lucky third son of a king could ever find his way to her? Dr. James? She asked herself the question and shook her head violently. But supposing he should fall in love with her, would she have the strength to remind herself that he was a fussy, methodical young man whom she would never ordinarily have looked at? All at once, she remembered that she had not told him the end of her dream.

She was matriculating at a place called Eggshell College.

There was an outing cabin, and there were three tall young men, all of them a sort of dun color, awkward, heavy-featured, without charm, a little like the pictures of Nazi prisoners that the Soviet censor passes. They stumbled about the cabin, bumping their heads on the rafters. She was sorry she had gone there, and she sat down at a table, resolved to take no part in the proceedings. Two other girls materialized, low-class girls, the kind you said "Hello, there" to on the campus. A sort of rude party commenced. Finally one of the men came toward her, and she got up at once, her manner becoming more animated. In a moment she was flirting with him and telling one of the other girls, "Really, he is not so bad as the others. He is quite interesting when you begin to talk to him." His face changed, his hair grew dark and wavy. There was something Byronic about him. He bent down to kiss her; it was a coarse, loutish kiss. "There must be some mistake," she thought. "Perhaps I kissed the wrong one," and she looked up to find that the Byronic air was gone; he was exactly like the others. But in a few minutes it happened again; his skin whitened, his thick, flat nose refined itself, developed a handsome bridge. When he kissed her this time, she kept her eyes shut, knowing very well what she would see if she opened them, knowing that it was now too late, for now she wanted him anyway.

The memory of the dream struck her now, like a heavy breaker. She stopped in the street, gasping. "Oh, my God," she demanded incredulously, "how could I, how could I?" In a moment, she told herself that it was only a dream, that she had not really done that, that this time at least she need feel no remorse. Her thirsty spirit gulped the consoling draft. But it was insufficient. She could not disown the dream. It belonged to her. If she had not yet embraced a captive Nazi, it was only an accident of time and geography, a lucky break. Now for the first time she saw her own extremity, saw that it was some failure in self-love that obliged her to snatch blindly at the love of others, hoping to love herself through them, borrowing their feelings, as the moon borrowed light. She herself was a dead planet. It was she who was the Nazi prisoner, the pseudo-Byron, the equivocal personality who was not truly protean

but only appeared so. And yet, she thought, walking on, she could still detect her own frauds. At the end of the dream, her eyes were closed, but the inner eye had remained alert. She could still distinguish the Nazi prisoner from the English milord, even in the darkness of need.

“O my God,” she said, pausing to stare in at a drugstore window that was full of hot-water bottles, “do not let them take this away from me. If the flesh must be blind, let the spirit see. Preserve me in disunity. *O di*,” she said aloud, “*red-dite me hoc pro pietate mea.*”

It was certainly a very small favor she was asking, but, like Catullus, she could not be too demanding, for, unfortunately, she did not believe in God.

# *Caput Mortuum*

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*by EDITA MORRIS*

**W**HEN Father's wife went shopping, he used to tell us about Mother. My, but they must have had it cozy! Cozy as cozy can be!

Winter or summer, it was always warm and snug. In winter Father used to sit before a sizzling fire in a little room with carpets on both floor and walls, while Mother stood in a warm velvet dress laying out the brandy glasses on the woolly pouf by his feet. In summer they would stay on the balcony, and Father would lie fanning himself and laughing because of the beautiful pearls of sweat on Mother's brow. Before them would be an ice bucket, and Mother would stand twirling the punch bottle about in the ice to get it cool.

"Was it always time to put out drinks?" asked Elsa.

"What?" said Father. "Oh, no-no, of course not," he said, and looked quickly toward the door. When he saw that it was properly shut, he put his hand over his eyes; it looked white against his dark nose. When he took it away, he was smiling at us. "There was an orange-colored lamp above the dining table," he said. "It made the schnapps decanter glow like a rose! Your mother would pour us out two little glasses the moment that she heard my key in the lock, and I'd march straight in with fur coat and cap and snow and all, and we'd toss off our glasses—just like that! When we had filled them again, we would walk about with our arms around each other and glasses in our hands. Round and round the table we would walk, singing, 'Drink, drink, the golden drop, the joyful drop. La, la, la-la, la, la.' Oh, children, her waist was thin as a wasp's. And it was just as silky as a silk-worm's waist."

"Weren't you hungry?" Elsa said. "Didn't you want your dinner?"

"Eh?" said Father. "Dinner? B'r. Don't speak of dinner." But then he said quickly, putting his arm around both of us, "Of course *you* must eat—big growing girls like you! You must eat great hunks of meat and bread and such things. But Mother and I—why, we just used to nibble." He sat and laughed, and his laughter had a rustling sound, as if he were crumpling up tissue paper inside him. "We would find a fork and sit on the edge of the table to peck at things," he said. "Pickled and salted and soused things that just beg for schnapps and make beer seem like a river breaking through parched earth. My word but we used to have our fill of schnapps! The room simply stood on end."

"And then Mother would bring out the brandy. She would put it on the pouf, wouldn't she?" I asked Father.

"Yes, yes," Father answered, laughing, and he leaned back in the sofa and drew up his knees with his hands. "Yes, she'd bring in the brandy. I'd get myself safely installed in the big chair and then she'd dance out and come back slowly—slowly, balancing the bottle on her head, just like an Italian girl balances a pitcher. Her arms would be raised up high, like two long lily stalks, and her hands would hold the gleaming bottle on her head, red with the color of *caput mortuum*—"

"Of what?" Elsa asked.

"Of blood that has been tinged by death. Dark and frightening is the color of brandy grown old in cellars."

Soon afterward, Father told us, Mother would go to fetch another beautiful bottle, and then later they would go to sleep beside the fire. Then little gilt hairpins would drop out of Mother's hair—one by one they would drop upon the carpet. Often they would sleep there in the big chair the whole night through. How lovely it must have been! How wonderful! It was only the maid who spoiled things. Father said that she used to get furious when she found them there, so when he woke up toward dawn he would carry Mother to their bed in her long crumpled velvet dress. She would be quite limp, and her velvet arms fell down his back like lily stalks that had been

broken. They would sit on the bed and try to get undressed, and giggle and giggle because it was so difficult. Almost impossible it used to be to get undressed, and in the end they sometimes had to cut Mother's ribbons and fastenings with a knife!

"Why was it so difficult?" Elsa asked.

"Well, have you ever tried to get undressed, my little Elsa, when you were a bit—that is to say when you were. . . ." He didn't finish, and sat and laughed until he rattled. It sounded as if there was something broken loose inside him. "No, I don't suppose you ever have," he answered himself. "Buttons stick in their holes and won't come out when one's—when one's—sleepy," he said, and all at once he looked as if he were terribly bored with Elsa.

Apart from the maid's not letting them sleep in the big chair, they didn't like her anyway. She used to stand and sigh while she sponged the front of Mother's velvet dress, for the dried punch used to get as stiff as sugar. She looked disgusted and superior as she did it. She gave Mother the shivers, too, because of her spying on them. When she brought in Grandma's weekly letter, she used to watch Mother with a sneer while she read it aloud to Father, though pretending to be dusting the whole time. Once when Grandma wrote about Elsa and me and about how happy we were with her in the country, the maid gave a sort of a snort and walked right out of the room! After that they sacked her.

It was ever so much nicer without a maid. They soon found out that they hadn't really needed her, because they didn't want to eat much anyway, and it was terribly hot, so they just lived out on their little balcony. They used to bring all the punch bottles out at once, so that they wouldn't have to keep trotting back and forth all the time. "The bottles lay and pitched about in the ice pail and got white as snowmen from the cooking salt," said Father.

But there were other people just as silly as the maid. They stood on the street and stared up at them as Mother sat singing on the balcony with her head against the creeper roses, and roses stuck in her hair. "People can't bear you when you're

happy," Father said—at least not when you're always happy, as he and Mother were. "How can they expect the Kingdom of God to come when they won't even let happiness come?" said Father.

One day a policeman came up to see them. He wasn't really nasty but just stood about smelling sweaty and talking in a haw-haw way. The trouble was that Mother had emptied her glass of punch over the balcony railing, right onto the hat of an old gentleman who was walking by. The whole time that the policeman talked, Father kept his arm about Mother's waist, and Mother laughed and laughed and told the policeman that there were roses growing on the gentleman's hat and that she only had wanted to water them for him. She said that she was going to do that every time he passed underneath their balcony. "Every time—every single time," Mother promised him. Then she took all the flowers from her hair and hung them on the policeman's saber belt, and he wasn't angry about the whole thing at all. Only after that they weren't so fond of the balcony any more. There always seemed to be a crowd of people by the lamp post staring up at them.

Anyway, it got to be winter soon, and it was terribly cozy indoors, with no maid to worry them. Mother always had thought it silly to fuss so much about being dressed or not being dressed and to make such a difference between day and night. Now she began to think it even sillier, so she brought her playing cards and all sorts of things to bed with her. She had a basket with skeins of colored silk—burgundy and emerald and milky gray—and she used to sit and play with them, loving their lovely colors.

Oh, how Father hated to leave her and go down to the hard icy street, where heaps of people, blue from the cold, ran in one direction and heaps ran in the other, all staring straight ahead! "And where did they think that they were going?" Father said. "As if one ever got anywhere by tearing about!"

Mother called their poster bed "our little house with the thatched roof," and Father began to stay in their little house the whole day, too. They got awfully angry with him at his office because of that and told him that he needn't come back.

But a lot Father cared! It wasn't as if Mother and he wanted to buy big roast beefs all the time, costing lots of money, or legs of mutton. They ate hardly a thing and didn't need any money. They stayed in their little house with the thatched roof all day long, and Father would just kick all the playing cards and the spools of silk and the brandy glasses onto the floor when they wanted to go to sleep.

Sometimes he got up and made a fire in the sitting room, and then Mother's bare feet would come pattering after him. They would fetch a nice bottle and sit in their big chair for a change, Mother with just her Angora shawl on. It felt like a kitten's ear to touch, and Mother loved it like a live animal, even though it was in rags with bits of wool sticking out of it.

Much of the trouble began with that shawl, Father told us. It was in February or thereabouts, and they had forgotten to answer Grandma's letters ever since the autumn. "Happy people never bother about writing letters," Father said. Finally Grandma sent her housekeeper up to town. She came marching in one day and began to open all the windows and to tidy up. She even tried to coax Mother to get out of bed and dress. She got out a pair of shoes and made Mother put her feet in them. Through it all Mother sat as still as a flower growing in a pot, but when that awful woman started pulling off the shawl, then she went wild. She ripped off everything that the housekeeper had put on her, and the clothes flew about the room like birds. The moment the housekeeper was gone, they were back in bed again! They jumped right back into bed and took a lovely red bottle of brandy with them to celebrate. They were so happy to be alone again they didn't know what to do, and they finished up the whole bottle before you could say knife. My, but they must have had it cozy! Cozy as cozy can be!

But that housekeeper was a cunning one! She sneaked out to make a telephone call to Grandma, and then she took the night train back to the country and sat talking Grandma full of nonsense. In two days Grandma herself was in town, and then all sorts of things began to happen. Father wasn't able to remember them exactly, but he said that all at once life went limp. It must have been early spring, for there always seemed

to be rain washing down the windowpanes, and inside the flat there was plenty of water, too, for a hag was scrubbing floors. Yes, there was water everywhere—and tears. Grandma sat weeping. Tears and the hag's scrubbing brush and rain on the windowpanes! "Oh, Lord!" Father said, and he rocked back and forth shivering between Elsa and me. He got all cold, just thinking back on it. The pores in his nose looked as big as the holes in the top of a pepper box.

He remembered also a strange female in white being about during those awful days. She had worn a badge saying that she was a nurse or something, and had had on such a blinding white apron that Father had to blink his eyes and screw up his face when he passed her in the hall. Maybe it was because she was ugly that he simply had to make faces at her when he talked to her—such awful faces that she used to get scared and run off screaming. Of course he had been spoiled, always having Mother's delicious little face so close to his, with her funny nose and warm mouth and silky cheeks. He said that he used to find himself doing the queerest things, like wiggling his ears or twitching his nose, whenever he had to look at an ugly woman.

But though there were strangers in their flat, there was one thing no one dared do, and that was rout Mother out of bed. The doctor said no. She wasn't at all well, poor little love, Father told us. She was ill, ill. And the worst of it was that they wouldn't let him nurse her. Think of it! He, who knew exactly what she wanted and needed, wasn't allowed to look after her. One little glass or two would have set her right, but the idiots told him that that was just what she shouldn't have! If he wanted to kill himself he should go ahead, only he had to leave Mother alone. They wouldn't even let him in her room, for fear that he might sneak her something. Oh, wasn't it cruel! When Father and Mother were just aching for each other, and Mother lay calling for him and screaming so loud that the neighbors got furious. It was the wickedest thing.

"Don't you think I could have taken care of Mother, children?" Father asked us, his face wet from crying. "Don't you?" And I answered, "Of course, darling. Of course you could

have!" We sat, all three of us, with our arms around each other, and we held each other hard.

Father told us that the people in the other flats kept on complaining, and that that was the reason they made Mother go to that place, whatever it was called, where they teach people to get well. But when they wouldn't let Mother take her shawl along with her because it was so dirty, and wouldn't even let her tie funny ribbons in her hair to look pretty for the journey, then Father saw red. He gave that awful nurse such a whack on her stony chest that she screamed and toppled over, and then Father ran into Mother's room. Oh, how he and Mother held on to each other! How they squeezed one another!

"Oh, oh, children!" said Father, weeping. "Oh, it's as if it was yesterday. It hurts like a red-hot iron stuck in here—here! And I didn't even have time to sneak her a little something to comfort her before those ambulance men came clamp-clamping up the stairs. Oh! Oh!" He sat and wept, and he was so thin for Elsa and me to hug. He scarcely could hold himself upright. His tears fell into our hair and felt just like rain, and we kept listening for the front door, so scared that Father's wife would come back and find him like that again.

"Was the hospital terrible?" Elsa said. She knew that she shouldn't ask that, but she never could stop herself.

"Eh?" said Father. "The what? Oh, the hospital. Yes, it was ghastly—it was a dreadful place, children. And to think of Mother in her hard white bed, seeing snakes and tigers with me not there to help her! To think of her straining backward when they hissed and breathed their hot breath on her! That's what finished me off—sitting in our empty flat thinking of my darling. In the end I only wanted to crow like a cock. Do you know, children, that's the only thing I wanted to do. I don't know why, but it helped me when I stood on one leg and crowed really hard."

Oh, what awful days Father had! And later when they locked him in the hospital, too, it was worse. They used to jump on him if he even sneezed, and not a drop of anything could he squeeze out of them.

"I needed something—I needed something terribly to make

me feel close to her again," said Father. "The tiniest little drop would have helped me along after my darling was. . . . I mean after my darling wasn't any more. Oh, I was so alone, so cold! All day I sat hunched up on a little chair behind the barred window and thought of how cold I was. I couldn't think of anything else. And I'm frozen now, children! My teeth are chattering, even though I'm cured. They won't stop chattering till I get a little something to remember Mother by. Just a little something warming—a little glassful. . . ."

Elsa and I lay across Father's knees and cried. We knew that we'd have to grow up and earn money quickly so as to get him a little something warming. Elsa asked, "What was the color of the stuff in the bottle that Mother carried on her head that day—that day you were so awfully happy?"

"*Caput mortuum*," Father said. "The color of blood that has been tinged by death. Oh, children, I can't wait much longer. My legs are getting icy—that's the end. I must shout. I must!" And he opened his mouth. But we clapped our hands over it, for there were the steps of Father's wife coming down the passage, click-click. She had finished with her shopping.

# Horsie

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by DOROTHY PARKER

WHEN young Mrs. Gerald Cruger came home from the hospital, Miss Wilmarth came along with her and the baby. Miss Wilmarth was an admirable trained nurse, sure and calm and tireless, with a real taste for the arranging of flowers in bowls and vases. She had never known a patient to receive so many flowers, or such uncommon ones: yellow violets and strange lilies and little white orchids poised like a bevy of delicate moths along green branches. Care and thought must have been put into their selection that they, like all the other fragile and costly things she kept about her, should be so right for young Mrs. Cruger. No one who knew her could have caught up the telephone and lightly bidden the florist to deliver her one of his five-dollar assortments of tulips, stock, and daffodils. Camilla Cruger was no complement to garden blooms.

Sometimes, when she opened the shiny boxes and carefully grouped the cards, there would come a curious expression upon Miss Wilmarth's face. Playing over shorter features, it might almost have been one of wistfulness. Upon Miss Wilmarth, it served to perfect the strange resemblance that she bore through her years: her face was truly complete with that look of friendly melancholy peculiar to the gentle horse. It was not, of course, Miss Wilmarth's fault that she looked like a horse. Indeed, there was nowhere to attach any blame. But the resemblance remained.

She was tall, pronounced of bone, and erect of carriage; it was somehow impossible to speculate upon her appearance undressed. Her long face was innocent, indeed ignorant of cosmetics, and its color stayed steady. Confusion, heat, or haste

caused her neck to flush crimson. Her mild hair was pinned with loops of nicked black wire into a narrow knot, practical to support her little high cap, like a charlotte russe from a bakeshop. She had big, trustworthy hands, scrubbed and dry, with nails cut short and so deeply cleaned with some small sharp instrument that the ends stood away from the spatulate finger-tips. Gerald Cruger, who nightly sat opposite her at his own dinner table, tried not to see her hands. It irritated him to be reminded by their sight that they must feel like hard rubber and smell of white soap. For him, women who were not softly lovely all over were simply not women. He tried, too, so far as it was possible to his manners, to keep his eyes from her face.

Not that it was unpleasant—a kind face, certainly. But, as he told Camilla, once he looked he stayed fascinated, awaiting the toss and the whinny.

“I love horses, myself,” he said to Camilla, who lay all white and languid on her apricot satin chaise-longue. “I’m a fool for a horse. Ah, what a noble animal, darling! All I say is, nobody has any business to go around looking like a horse and behaving as if it were all right. You don’t catch horses going around looking like people, do you?”

He did not dislike Miss Wilmarth; he only resented her. He had no bad wish in the world for her, but he waited with longing the day she would leave. She was so skilled and rhythmic in her work that she disrupted the household but little. Nevertheless, her presence was an onus. There was that thing of dining with her every evening. It was a chore for him, certainly, and one that did not ease with repetition, but there was no choice. Everyone had always heard of trained nurses’ bristling insistence that they be not treated as servants; Miss Wilmarth could not be asked to dine with the maids. He would not have dinner out; be away from *Camilla*? It was too much to expect the maids to institute a second dinner service or to carry trays, other than Camilla’s, up and down the stairs. There were only three servants and they had work enough.

“Those children,” Camilla’s mother was wont to say, chuckling. “Those two kids. The independence of them! Struggling

along on cheese and kisses. Why, they hardly let me pay for the trained nurse. And it was all we could do, last Christmas, to make Camilla take the Packard and the chauffeur."

So Gerald dined each night with Miss Wilmarth. The small dread of his hour with her struck suddenly at him in the afternoon. He would forget it for stretches of minutes, only to be smitten sharper as the time drew near. On his way home from his office, he found grim entertainment in rehearsing his table talk, and plotting desperate innovations to it.

Cruger's Compulsory Conversations: Lesson I, a Dinner with a Miss Wilmarth, a Trained Nurse. Good evening, Miss Wilmarth. Well! And how were the patients all day? That's good, that's fine. Well! The baby gained two ounces, did she? That's fine. Yes, that's right, she will be before we know it. That's right. Well! Mrs. Cruger seems to be getting stronger every day, doesn't she? That's good, that's fine. That's right, up and about before we know it. Yes, she certainly will. Well! Any visitors today? That's good. Didn't stay too long, did they? That's fine. Well! No, no, no, Miss Wilmarth—*you* go ahead. I wasn't going to say anything at all, really. No, really. Well! Well! I see where they found those two aviators after all. Yes, they certainly do run risks. That's right. Yes. Well! I see where they've been having a regular old-fashioned blizzard out West. Yes, we certainly have had a mild winter. That's right. Well! I see where they held up that jeweler's shop right in broad daylight on Fifth Avenue. Yes, I certainly don't know what we're coming to. That's right. Well! I see the cat. Do you see the cat? The cat is on the mat. It certainly is. Well! Pardon me, Miss Wilmarth, but must you look so much like a horse? Do you like to look like a horse, Miss Wilmarth? That's good, Miss Wilmarth, that's fine. You certainly do, Miss Wilmarth. That's right. Well! Will you for God's sake finish your oats, Miss Wilmarth, and let me get out of this?

Every evening he reached the dining-room before Miss Wilmarth and stared gloomily at silver and candle-flame until she was upon him. No sound of footfall heralded her coming, for her ample canvas oxfords were soled with rubber; there would be a protest of parquet, a trembling of ornaments, a creak, a

rustle, and the authoritative smell of stiff linen; and there she would be, set for her ritual of evening cheer.

"Well, Mary," she would cry to the waitress, "you know what they say—better late than never!"

But no smile would mellow Mary's lips, no light her eyes. Mary, in converse with the cook, habitually referred to Miss Wilmarth as "that one." She wished no truck with Miss Wilmarth or any of the others of her guild; always in and out of a person's pantry.

Once or twice Gerald saw a strange expression upon Miss Wilmarth's face as she witnessed the failure of the adage with the maid. He could not quite classify it. Though he did not know, it was the look she sometimes had when she opened the shiny white boxes and lifted the exquisite, scentless blossoms that came for Camilla. Anyway, whatever it was, it increased her equine resemblance to such a point that he thought of proffering her an apple.

But she always had her big smile turned toward him when she sat down. Then she would look at the thick watch strapped to her wrist and give a little squeal that brought the edges of his teeth together.

"Mercy!" she would say. "My good mercy! Why, I had no more idea it was so late. Well, you mustn't blame me, Mr. Cruger. Don't you scold *me*. You'll just have to blame that daughter of yours. She's the one that keeps us all busy."

"She certainly is," he would say. "That's right."

He would think, and with small pleasure, of the infant Diane, pink and undistinguished and angry, among the ruffles and *choux* of her bassinet. It was her doing that Camilla had stayed so long away from him in the odorous limbo of the hospital, her doing that Camilla lay all day upon her apricot satin chaise-longue. "We must take our time," the doctor said, "just ta-a-ake our *ti-yem*." Yes; well, that would all be because of young Diane. It was because of her, indeed, that night upon night he must face Miss Wilmarth and comb up conversation. All right, young Diane, there you are and nothing to do about it. But you'll be an only child, young woman, that's what *you'll* be.

Always Miss Wilmarth followed her opening pleasantry about the baby with a companion piece. Gerald had come to know it so well he could have said it in duet with her.

"You wait," she would say. "Just you wait. You're the one that's going to be kept busy when the beaux start coming around. You'll see. That young lady's going to be a heart-breaker if ever I saw one."

"I guess that's right," Gerald would say, and he would essay a small laugh and fail at it. It made him uncomfortable, somehow embarrassed him, to hear Miss Wilmarth banter of swains and conquest. It was unseemly, as rouge would have been unseemly on her long mouth and perfume on her flat bosom.

He would hurry her over to her own ground. "Well!" he would say. "Well! And how were the patients all day?"

But that, even with the baby's weight and the list of the day's visitors, seldom lasted past the soup.

"Doesn't that woman ever go out for dinner?" he asked Camilla. "Doesn't our Horsie ever rate a night off?"

"Where would she want to go?" Camilla said. Her low, lazy words had always the trick of seeming a little weary of their subject.

"Well," Gerald said, "she might take herself a moonlight canter around the park."

"Oh, she doubtless gets a thrill out of dining with you," Camilla said. "You're a man, they tell me, and she can't have seen many. Poor old horse. She's not a bad soul."

"Yes," he said, "and what a round of pleasure it is, having dinner every night with Not a Bad Soul."

"What makes you think," Camilla said, "that I am caught up in any whirl of gaiety, lying here?"

"Oh, darling," he said. "Oh, my poor darling. I didn't mean it, honestly I didn't. Oh, *Lord*, I didn't mean it. How could I complain, after all you've been through, and I haven't done a thing? Please, sweet, please. Ah, Camilla, say you know I didn't mean it."

"After all," Camilla said, "you just have her at dinner. I have her around all day."

"Sweetheart, please," he said. "Oh, poor angel."

He dropped to his knees by the chaise-longue and crushed her limp, fragrant hand against his mouth. Then he remembered about being very, very gentle. He ran little apologetic kisses up and down her fingers and murmured of lilies.

Her visitors said that Camilla looked lovelier than ever, but they were mistaken. She was only as lovely as she had always been. They spoke in hushed voices of the new look in her eyes since her motherhood; but it was the same far brightness that had always lain there. They said how white she was and how apart from other people; they forgot that she had always been pale as moonlight and had always worn a delicate disdain, as light as the lace that covered her breast. Her doctor cautioned tenderly against hurry, besought her to take recovery slowly—Camilla, who had never done anything quickly in her life. Her friends gathered, adoring, about the apricot satin chaise-longue where Camilla lay and moved her hands as if they hung heavy from her wrists; they had been wont, before, to gather and adore at the white satin sofa in the drawing-room where Camilla reclined, her hands like heavy lilies in a languid breeze. Every night, when Gerald crossed the threshold of her fragrant room, his heart leaped and his words caught in his throat; but those things had always befallen him at the sight of her. Motherhood had not brought perfection to Camilla's loveliness. She had had that before.

Gerald came home early enough, each evening, to have a while with her before dinner. He made his cocktails in her room, and watched her as she slowly drank one. Miss Wilmarth was in and out, touching flowers, patting pillows. Sometimes she brought Diane in on display, and those would be minutes of real discomfort for Gerald. He could not bear to watch her with the baby in her arms, so acute was his vicarious embarrassment at her behavior. She would bring her long head down close to Diane's tiny, stern face and toss it back again high on her rangy neck, all the while that strange words, in a strange treble, came from her.

"Well, her wuzza booful dirl. Ess, her wuzza. Her wuzza, wuzza, wuzza. Ess, her *wuzz*." She would bring the baby over to him. "See, Daddy. Isn't us a gate, bid dirl? Isn't us booful?"

Say 'nigh-nigh,' Daddy. Us doe teepy-by, now. Say 'nigh-nigh.'"

Oh, God.

Then she would bring the baby to Camilla. "Say 'nigh-nigh,'" she would cry. "Nigh-nigh, Mummy."

"If that brat ever calls you 'Mummy,'" he told Camilla once, fiercely, "I'll turn her out in the snow."

Camilla would look at the baby, amusement in her slow glance. "Good-night, useless," she would say. She would hold out a finger, for Diane's pink hand to curl around. And Gerald's heart would quicken, and his eyes sting and shine.

Once he tore his gaze from Camilla to look at Miss Wilmarth, surprised by the sudden cessation of her falsetto. She was no longer lowering her head and tossing it back. She was standing quite still, looking at him over the baby; she looked away quickly, but not before he had seen that curious expression on her face again. It puzzled him, made him vaguely uneasy. That night she made no further exhortations to Diane's parents to utter the phrase "nigh-nigh." In silence she carried the baby out of the room and back to the nursery.

One evening Gerald brought two men home with him: lean, easily dressed young men, good at golf and squash rackets, his companions through his college and in his clubs. They had cocktails in Camilla's room, grouped about the chaise-longue. Miss Wilmarth, standing in the nursery adjoining, testing the temperature of the baby's milk against her wrist, could hear them all talking lightly and swiftly, tossing their sentences into the air to hang there unfinished. Now and again she could distinguish Camilla's lazy voice; the others stopped immediately when she spoke, and when she was done there were long peals of laughter. Miss Wilmarth pictured her lying there, in golden chiffon and deep lace, her light figure turned always a little away from those about her, so that she must move her head and speak her slow words over her shoulder to them. The trained nurse's face was astoundingly equine as she looked at the wall that separated them.

They stayed in Camilla's room a long time, and there was always more laughter. The door from the nursery into the hall

was open, and presently she heard the door of Camilla's room being opened, too. She had been able to hear only voices before, but now she could distinguish Gerald's words as he called back from the threshold; they had no meaning to her.

"Only wait, fellers," he said. "Wait till you see Spark-plug."

He came to the nursery door. He held a cocktail shaker in one hand and a filled glass in the other.

"Oh, Miss Wilmarth," he said. "Oh, good evening, Miss Wilmarth. Why, I didn't know this door was open—I mean, I hope we haven't been disturbing you."

"Oh, not the least little bit," she said. "Goodness."

"Well!" he said. "I—we were wondering if you wouldn't have a little cocktail. Won't you, please?" He held out the glass to her.

"Mercy," she said, taking it. "Why, thank you ever so much. Thank you, Mr. Cruger."

"And, oh, Miss Wilmarth," he said, "would you tell Mary there'll be two more to dinner? And ask her not to have it before half an hour or so, will you? Would you mind?"

"Not the least little bit," she said. "Of course, I will."

"Thank you," he said. "Well! Thank you, Miss Wilmarth. Well! See you at dinner."

"Thank *you*," she said. "I'm the one that ought to thank *you*. For the lovely little cocktail."

"Oh," he said, and failed at an easy laugh. He went back into Camilla's room and closed the door behind him.

Miss Wilmarth set her cocktail upon a table, and went down to inform Mary of the impending guests. She felt light and quick, and she told Mary gaily, awaiting a flash of gaiety in response. But Mary received the news impassively, made a grunt but no words, and slammed out through the swinging doors into the kitchen. Miss Wilmarth stood looking after her. Somehow servants never seemed to— She should have become used to it.

Even though the dinner hour was delayed, Miss Wilmarth was a little late. The three young men were standing in the dining-room, talking all at once and laughing all together. They stopped their noise when Miss Wilmarth entered, and Gerald

moved forward to perform introductions. He looked at her, and then looked away. Prickling embarrassment tormented him. He introduced the young men, with his eyes away from her.

Miss Wilmarth had dressed for dinner. She had discarded her linen uniform and put on a frock of dark blue taffeta, cut down to a point at the neck and given sleeves that left bare the angles of her elbows. Small, stiff ruffles occurred about the hips and the skirt was short for its year. It revealed that Miss Wilmarth had clothed her ankles in roughened gray silk and her feet in black, casket-shaped slippers, upon which little bows quivered as if in lonely terror at the expanse before them. She had been busied with her hair; it was crimped and loosened, and ends that had escaped the tongs were already sliding from their pins. All the length of her nose and chin was heavily powdered; not with a perfumed dust, tinted to praise her skin, but with coarse, bright white talcum.

Gerald presented his guests; Miss Wilmarth, Mr. Minot; Miss Wilmarth, Mr. Forster. One of the young men, it turned out, was Freddy, and one, Tommy. Miss Wilmarth said she was pleased to meet each of them. Each of them asked her how she did.

She sat down at the candle-lit table with the three beautiful young men. Her usual evening vivacity was gone from her. In silence she unfolded her napkin and took up her soup-spoon. Her neck glowed crimson, and her face, even with its powder, looked more than ever as if it should have been resting over the top rail of a paddock fence.

“Well!” Gerald said.

“Well!” Mr. Minot said.

“Getting much warmer out, isn’t it?” Mr. Forster said. “Notice it?”

“It is, at that,” Gerald said. “Well. We’re about due for warm weather.”

“Yes, we ought to expect it now,” Mr. Minot said. “Any day now.”

“Oh, it’ll be here,” Mr. Forster said. “It’ll come.”

“I love spring,” said Miss Wilmarth, suddenly. “I just love it.”

Gerald looked deep into his soup plate. The two young men looked at her.

“Darn good time of year,” Mr. Minot said. “Certainly is.”

“And how it is!” Mr. Forster said.

They ate their soup.

There was champagne all through dinner. Miss Wilmarth watched Mary fill her glass, none too full; the wine looked gay and pretty. She looked about the table before she took her first sip. She remembered Camilla’s voice and the men’s laughter.

“Well,” she cried. “Here’s a health, everybody!”

The guests looked at her. Gerald reached for his glass and gazed at it as intently as if he beheld a champagne goblet for the first time. They all murmured and drank.

“Well!” Mr. Minot said. “Your patients seem to be getting along pretty well, Miss Witmark. Don’t they?”

“I should say they do,” she said. “And they’re pretty nice patients, too. Aren’t they, Mr. Cruger?”

“They certainly are,” Gerald said. “That’s right.”

“They certainly are,” Mr. Minot said. “That’s what they are. Well. You must meet all sorts of people in your work, I suppose. Must be pretty interesting.”

“Oh, sometimes it is,” Miss Wilmarth said. “It depends on the people.” Her words fell from her lips clear and separate, sterile as if each had been freshly swabbed with boracic acid solution. In her ears rang Camilla’s light, insolent drawl.

“That’s right,” Mr. Forster said. “Everything depends on the people, doesn’t it? Always does, wherever you go. No matter what you do. Still, it must be wonderfully interesting work. Wonderfully.”

“Wonderful the way this country’s come right up in medicine,” Mr. Minot said. “They tell me we have the greatest doctors in the world, right here. As good as any in Vienna. Or Harley Street.”

“I see,” Gerald said, “where they think they’ve found a new cure for spinal meningitis.”

“Have they really?” Mr. Minot said.

"Yes, I saw that, too," Mr. Forster said. "Wonderful thing. Wonderfully interesting."

"Oh, say, Gerald," Mr. Minot said, and he went from there into an account, hole by hole, of his most recent performance at golf. Gerald and Mr. Forster listened and questioned him.

The three young men left the topic of golf and came back to it again, and left it and came back. In the intervals, they related to Miss Wilmarth various brief items that had caught their eyes in the newspapers. Miss Wilmarth answered in exclamations, and turned her big smile readily to each of them. There was no laughter during dinner.

It was a short meal, as courses went. After it, Miss Wilmarth bade the guests good night and received their bows and their "*good night, Miss Witmark.*" She said she was awfully glad to have met them. They murmured.

"Well, good night, then, Mr. Cruger," she said. She stood in the doorway and smiled back at him. "See you tomorrow!"

"Good night, Miss Wilmarth," Gerald said. She stood there a moment, wearing her smile and looking from one to another.

The three young men went and sat with Camilla. Miss Wilmarth could hear their voices and their laughter, as she hung up her dark blue taffeta dress.

Miss Wilmarth stayed with the Crugers for three weeks. Camilla was pronounced well—so well that she could have dined downstairs on the last few nights of Miss Wilmarth's stay, had she been able to support the fardel of dinner at the table with the trained nurse.

"I really couldn't dine opposite that face," she told Gerald. "You go amuse Horsie at dinner. You must be good at it, by now."

"All right, I will, darling," he said. "But God keep me, when she asks for another lump of sugar, from holding it out to her on my palm."

"Only two more nights," Camilla said, "and then Thursday Nana'll be here, and she'll be gone forever."

"'Forever,' sweet, is my favorite word in the language," Gerald said.

Nana was the round and competent Scottish woman who

had nursed Camilla through her childhood and was scheduled to engineer the unknowing Diane through hers. She was a comfortable woman, easy to have in the house; a servant, and knew it.

Only two more nights. Gerald went down to dinner whistling a good old tune:

“The old gray mare, she ain’t what she used to be,  
Ain’t what she used to be, ain’t what she used to be—”

The final dinners with Miss Wilmarth were like all the others. He arrived first, and stared at the candles until she came.

“Well, Mary,” she cried, on her entrance, “you know what they say—better late than never.”

Mary, to the last, remained unamused.

Gerald was elated all the day of Miss Wilmarth’s departure. He had a holiday feeling, a last-day-of-school jubilation with none of its faint regret. He left his office early, stopped at a florist’s shop, and went home to Camilla.

Nana was installed in the nursery, but Miss Wilmarth had not yet left. She was in Camilla’s room, and he saw her for the second time out of uniform. She wore a long brown coat and a brown rubbed velvet hat of no definite shape. Obviously, she was in the middle of the dolors of farewell. The melancholy of her face made it so like a horse’s that the hat above it was preposterous.

“Why, there’s Mr. Cruger!” she cried.

“Oh, good evening, Miss Wilmarth,” he said. “Well! Ah, hello, darling. How are you, sweet? Like these?”

He laid a florist’s box in Camilla’s lap. In it were strange little yellow roses, with stems and leaves and tiny, soft thorns all of blood red. Miss Wilmarth gave a little squeal at the sight of them.

“Oh, the darlings!” she cried. “Oh, the boofuls!”

“And these are for you, Miss Wilmarth,” he said. He made himself face her and hold out to her a square, smaller box.

“Why, Mr. Cruger,” she said. “For me, really? Why, really, Mr. Cruger.”

She opened the box and found four gardenias, with green foil and pale green ribbon binding them together.

"Oh, now, really, Mr. Cruger," she said. "Why, I never in all my life— Oh, now, you shouldn't have done it. Really, you shouldn't. My good mercy! Well, I never saw anything so lovely in all my life. Did you, Mrs. Cruger? They're *lovely*. Well, I just don't know how to *begin* to thank you. Why, I just—well, I just adore them."

Gerald made sounds designed to convey the intelligence that he was glad she liked them, that it was nothing, that she was welcome. Her articulate appreciation made red rise back of his ears.

"They're nice ones," Camilla said. "Put them on, Miss Wilmarth. And these are awfully cunning, Jerry. Sometimes you have your points."

"Oh, I didn't think I'd *wear* them," Miss Wilmarth said. "I thought I'd just take them along in the box like this, so they'd keep better. And it's such a nice box—I'd like to have it. I—I'd like to keep it."

She looked down at the flowers. Gerald was in sudden horror that she might bring her head down close to them and toss it back high, crying "wuzza, wuzza, wuzza" the while.

"Honestly," she said, "I just can't take my eyes *off* them."

"The woman is mad," Camilla said. "It's the effect of living with us, I suppose. I hope we haven't ruined you for life, Miss Wilmarth."

"Why, Mrs. Cruger," Miss Wilmarth cried. "Now, really! I was just telling Mrs. Cruger, Mr. Cruger, that I've never been on a pleasanter case. I've just had the time of my life, all the time I was here. I don't know when I—honestly, I can't stop looking at my posies, they're so lovely. Well, I just can't thank you for all you've done."

"Well, we ought to thank *you*, Miss Wilmarth," Gerald said. "We certainly ought."

"I really hate to say 'good-by,'" Miss Wilmarth said. "I just hate it."

"Oh, don't say it," Camilla said. "I never dream of saying it.

And remember, you must come in and see the baby, any time you can."

"Yes, you certainly must," Gerald said. "That's right."

"Oh, I will," Miss Wilmarth said. "Mercy, I just don't dare go take another look at her, or I wouldn't be able to leave, ever. Well, what am I thinking of! Why, the car's been waiting all this time. Mrs. Cruger simply insists on sending me home in the car, Mr. Cruger. Isn't she terrible?"

"Why, not at all," he said. "Why, of course."

"It's only five blocks down and over to Lexington," she said, "or I really couldn't think of troubling you."

"Why, not at all," Gerald said. "Well! Is that where you live, Miss Wilmarth?"

She lived in some place of her own sometimes? She wasn't always disarranging somebody else's household?

"Yes," Miss Wilmarth said. "I have Mother there."

Oh. Now Gerald had never thought of her having a mother. Then there must have been a father, too, sometime. And Miss Wilmarth existed because two people once had loved and known. It was not an idea to dwell upon.

"My aunt's with us, too," Miss Wilmarth said. "It makes it nice for Mother—you see, Mother doesn't get around very well any more. It's a little bit crowded for the three of us—I sleep on the davenport in the living-room when I'm home, between cases. But it's so nice for Mother, having my aunt there."

"Oh, yes," Gerald said. "Yes, it certainly must be."

Even in her home, then, cutting across the rhythm of other lives. Carrying her bed-clothes in and out of the parlor, hanging her dresses among the garments of others, brushing her hair at a mirror that was not hers alone. Odd it must be, never to lie in a bed of one's own possession. Gerald did not pursue the speculation. Thought stopped at Miss Wilmarth in bed, any bed.

"Yes, indeed," Gerald said. "Must be a splendid thing for your mother. Well! Well! May I close your bags for you, Miss Wilmarth?"

"Oh, that's all done," she said. "The suit-case is downstairs. I'll just go get my hat-box. Well, good-by, then, Mrs. Cruger,

and take care of yourself. And thank you a thousand times."

"Good luck, Miss Wilmarth," Camilla said. "Come see Diane."

Miss Wilmarth looked at Camilla and at Gerald standing beside her, touching one long white hand. The trained nurse's expression, that one he had surprised on her face before, again harassed him. She left the room to fetch her hat-box.

"I'll take it down for you, Miss Wilmarth," Gerald called after her. He bent and kissed Camilla gently, very, very gently.

"Well, it's nearly over, darling," he said. "Sometimes I am practically convinced that there is a God."

"It was darn decent of you to bring her gardenias," Camilla said. "What made you think of it?"

"I was so crazed at the idea that she was really going," he said, "that I must have lost my head. No one was more surprised than I, buying gardenias for Horsie. Thank the Lord she didn't put them on. I couldn't have stood that sight."

"She's not really at her best in her street clothes," Camilla said. "She seems to lack a certain *chic*." She stretched her arms slowly above her head and let them sink slowly back. "That was a fascinating glimpse of her home life she gave us. Great fun."

"Oh, I don't suppose she minds," he said. "I'll go down now and back her into the car, and the hell with her."

He bent again over Camilla.

"Oh, you look so lovely, sweet," he said. "So *lovely*."

When he left the room, Miss Wilmarth was coming down the hall, managing a pasteboard hat-box, the florist's box, and a big leather purse that had known service. He took the boxes from her, against her protests, and followed her down the stairs and out to the motor at the curb. The chauffeur stood at the open door. Gerald was glad of that presence.

"Well, good luck, Miss Wilmarth," he said. "And thank you so much."

"Thank *you*, Mr. Cruger," she said. "I—I can't tell you how I've enjoyed it all the time I was here. I never had a pleasanter—And the flowers, and everything. I just don't know what to say. I'm the one that ought to thank *you*."

She held out her hand, in a brown cotton glove. Anyway, worn cotton was easier to the touch than dry, ropey flesh. It was the last moment of her. He scarcely minded looking at the long face on the red, red neck.

"Well!" he said. "Well! Got everything? Well, good luck, again, Miss Wilmarth, and don't forget us."

"Oh, I won't," she said. "I—oh, I won't do that."

She turned from him and got quickly into the car, to sit upright against the pale gray cushions. The chauffeur placed her hat-box at her feet and the florist's box on the seat beside her, closed the door smartly, and returned to his wheel. Gerald waved as the car slid away. Miss Wilmarth did not wave to him.

When she looked back, through the little rear window, he had already disappeared in the house. He must have run across the sidewalk—run, to get back to the fragrant room and the yellow roses and Camilla. Their little pink baby would lie sleeping in its bed. They would be alone together; they would dine alone together by candle-light; they would be alone together in the night. Every morning and every evening Gerald would drop to his knees beside her to kiss her perfumed hand and call her sweet. Always she would be perfect, in scented chiffon and deep lace. There would be lean, easy young men, to listen to her drawl and give her their laughter. Every day there would be shiny white boxes for her, filled with curious blooms. It would be like that for her forever; forever. It was perhaps fortunate that no one happened to see into the limousine. A beholder must have been startled to learn that a human face could look as much like that of a weary mare as did Miss Wilmarth's.

Presently the car swerved, in a turn of the traffic. The florist's box slipped against Miss Wilmarth's knee. She looked down at it. Then she took it on her lap, raised the lid a little and peeped at the waxy white bouquet. It would have been all fair then for a chance spectator; Miss Wilmarth's strange resemblance was scarcely apparent, as she looked at her flowers. They were her flowers. A man had given them to her. She had been given flowers. They might not fade, maybe, for days. And she could keep the box.

# *The Will*

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*by MARY LAVIN*

I COULDN'T say what I thought while he was here!" said Kate, the eldest of the family, closing the door after the solicitor, who had just read their mother's will to the Conroy family. She ran over to her youngest sister and threw out her hands. "I cannot tell you how shocked I am, Lally. We had no idea that she felt as bitter against you as all that. Had we?" She turned and appealed to the other members of the family who stood around the large red mahogany table, in their stiff black mourning clothes.

"I knew she felt bitter," said Matthew, the eldest of the sons. "We couldn't mention your name without raising a row!"

"She knocked over the lamp once," said Nonny, the youngest of the unmarried members. "Of late years she always kept a stick beside her on the counterpane of the bed and she tapped with it on the floor when she wanted anything, and then one day someone said something about you, I forget what it is they said, but she caught up the stick and drove it through the air with all her force. The next thing we knew the lamp was reeling off the table! The house would have been burned down about us if the lamp hadn't quenched with the draft of falling through the air!"

"Still even after that we never thought that she'd leave your name out of the parchment altogether. Did we?" Kate corroborated every remark by an appeal to the rest of the group. "We thought she'd leave you something anyway, no matter how small it might be!"

"But I don't mind," said Lally. "Honestly I don't. I wish you

didn't feel so bad about it, all of you." She looked around from one to the other beseechingly.

"Why wouldn't we feel bad!" said Matthew. "You're our own sister after all. She was your mother as well as ours, no matter what happened."

"The only thing I regret," said Lally, "was that I didn't get here before she died." The tears started into her eyes.

"I don't think it would have made any difference whether you got here in time or not before she went. The will was made years ago."

"Oh, I didn't mean anything like that!" said Lally in dismay, and a red blush struggled through the thickened cells of her skin. "I only meant to say that I'd like to have seen her, no matter what, before she went."

The tears streamed down her face then, and they ran freely, for her mind was far away thinking of the days before she left home at all. She made no attempt to dry her eyes. But the tears upset the others, who felt no inclination to cry. Having watched the old lady fade away in a long lingering illness, they had used up their emotional energy in anticipating grief. Their minds were filled now with practical arrangements.

"Don't upset yourself, Lally," said Kate. "Perhaps it all turned out for the best. If she had seen you she might only have flown into one of her rages and died sitting up in bed from a rush of blood to the forehead, instead of the nice natural death that she did get, lying straight out with her hands folded better than any undertaker could have folded them. Everything happened for the best."

"I don't suppose she mentioned my name, did she? Near the end, I mean."

"No, the last time she spoke about you was so long ago I couldn't rightly say now when it was. It was one night that she was feeling bad. She hadn't slept well the night before. I was tidying her room for her, plumping up her pillows and one thing and another, and she was looking out of the window. Suddenly she looked at me and asked me how old you were now. It gave me such a start to hear her mention your name after all those years that I couldn't remember what age you

were, so I just said the first thing that came into my head."

"What did she say?"

"She said nothing for a while and then she began to ramble about something under her breath. I couldn't catch the meaning. She used to wander a bit in her mind, now and again, especially if she had lost her sleep the night before."

"Do you think it was me she was talking about under her breath?" said Lally, and her eyes and her open lips and even the half-gesture of her outstretched hands seemed to beg for an answer in the affirmative.

"Oh, I don't know what she was rambling about," said Kate. "I had my mind fixed on getting the bed straightened out so she could lie back at her ease. I wasn't listening to what she was saying. All I remember is that she was saying something about blue feathers. Blue feathers! Her mind was astray for the time being I suppose."

The tears glistened in Lally's eyes again.

"I had two little blue feathers in my hat the morning I went into her room to tell her I was getting married. I had nothing new to put on me. I was wearing my old green silk costume, and my old green hat, but I bought two little pale blue feathers and pinned them on the front of the hat. I think the feathers upset her more than going against her wishes with the marriage. She kept staring at them all the time I was in the room, and even when she ordered me to get out of her sight it was at the feathers in my hat she was staring and not at me."

"Don't cry, Lally." Kate felt uncomfortable. "Don't cry. It's all over long ago. Don't be going back to the past. What is to be, is to be. I always believe that."

Matthew and Nonny believed that too. They told her not to cry. They said no good could be done by upsetting yourself.

"I never regretted it!" said Lally. "We had a hard time at the beginning, but I never regretted it."

Kate moved over and began to straighten the red plush curtains as if they had been the sole object of her change in position, but the movement brought her close to her thin brother Matthew where he stood fingering his chin uncertainly. Kate gave him a sharp nudge.

"Say what I told you," she said, speaking rapidly in a low voice.

Matthew cleared his throat. "You have no need for regret as far as we are concerned, Lally," he said, and he looked back at Kate who nodded her head vigorously for him to continue. "We didn't share our poor mother's feelings. Of course we couldn't help thinking that you could have done better for yourself but it's all past mending now, and we want you to know that we will do all in our power for you." He looked again at his sister Kate who nodded her head still more vigorously indicating that the most important thing had still been left unsaid. "We won't see you in want," said Matthew.

When this much had been said, Kate felt that her brother's authority had been deferred to sufficiently, and she broke into the conversation again.

"We won't let it be said by anyone that we'd see you in want, Lally. We talked it all over. We can make an arrangement." She looked across at Matthew again with a glance that seemed to toss the conversation to him as one might toss a ball.

"We were thinking," said Matthew, "that if each one of us was to part with a small sum the total would come to a considerable amount when it was all put together."

But Lally put up her hands again.

"Oh, no, no, no," she said. "I wouldn't want anything that didn't come to me by rights."

"It would only be a small sum from each one," said Nonny placatingly. "No one would feel any pinch."

"No, no, no," said Lally. "I couldn't let you do that. It would be going against her wishes."

"It's late in the day you let the thought of going against her wishes trouble you!" said Kate with an involuntary flash of impatience for which she hurried to atone by the next remark. "Why wouldn't you take it? It's yours as much as ours!"

"You might put it like that anyhow," said Matthew, "as long as we're not speaking legally."

"No, no, no," said Lally for the third time. "Don't you see? I'd hate taking it and knowing all the time that she didn't intend me to have it. And anyway you have to think of your-

selves." She looked at Kate. "You have your children to educate," she said. "You have this place to keep up, Matthew! And you have no one to look after you at all, Nonny. I won't take a penny from any of you."

"What about your own children?" said Kate. "Are you forgetting them?"

"Oh, they're all right," said Lally. "Things are different in the city. In the city there are plenty of free schools. And I'm doing very well. Every room in the house is full."

There was silence after that for a few minutes but glances passed between Kate and Nonny. Kate went over to the fire and picked up the poker. She drove it in among the blazing coals and rattled them up with such unusual violence that Matthew looked around at her where she knelt on the red carpet.

"Do you have to be prompted at every word?" said Kate when she got his attention.

Matthew cleared his throat again and, this time, at the sound Lally turned toward him expectantly.

"There is another thing that we were talking about before you arrived," he said, speaking quickly and nervously. "It would be in the interests of the family, Lally, if you were to give up keeping lodgers." He looked at her quickly to see how she took what he said, and then he stepped back a pace or two like an actor who had said his lines and made way for another person to say his.

While he was speaking Kate had remained kneeling at the grate with the poker in her hand but when he stopped she made a move to rise quickly. Her stiff new mourning skirt got in her way, however, and the cold and damp at the graveside had brought about an unexpected return of rheumatism, and so as she went to rise up quickly she listed forward with the jerky movement of a camel. It couldn't be certain whether Lally was laughing at Matthew's words, or at the camelish appearance of Kate. Kate, however, was the first to take offense. But she attributed the laughing to Matthew's words.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at, Lally," she said. "It's not a very nice thing for us to feel that our sister is a common

landlady in the city. Mother never forgave that! She might have forgiven your marriage in time but she couldn't forgive you for lowering yourself to keeping lodgers."

"We had to live somehow," said Lally, but she spoke lightly, and as she spoke she was picking off the green flies from the plant on the table.

"I can't say I blame Mother!" said Nonny, breaking into the discussion with a sudden venom. "I don't see why you were so anxious to marry him when it meant keeping lodgers."

"It was the other way round, Nonny," said Lally. "I was willing to keep lodgers because it meant I could marry him."

"Easy now!" said Matthew. "There's no need to quarrel. We must talk this thing over calmly. We'll come to some arrangement. But there's no need in doing everything the one day. Tomorrow is as good as today and better. Lally must be tired after traveling all the way down and then going on to the funeral without five minutes' rest. We'll talk it all over in the daylight tomorrow."

Lally looked back and forth from one face to another as if she was choosing the face that looked most lenient before she spoke again. At last she turned back to Matthew.

"I won't be here in the morning," she said, hurriedly, as if it was a matter of no consequence. "I am going back tonight. I only came down for the burial. I can't stay any longer."

"Why not?" demanded Kate, and then as if she knew the answer to the question and did not want to hear it upon her sister's lips, she continued to speak hurriedly. "You've got to stay," she said, stamping her foot. "You've got to stay. That's all there is to say about the matter."

"There is nothing to be gained by staying, anyway," said Lally. "I wouldn't take the money no matter what was said, tonight or tomorrow!"

Matthew looked at his other sisters. They nodded at him.

"There's nothing to be gained by being obstinate, Lally," he said lamely.

"You may think you are behaving unselfishly," said Kate, "but let me tell you it's not a nice thing for my children to feel that their first cousins are going to free schools in the city and

mixing with the lowest of the low, and running messages for your dirty lodgers. And as if that isn't bad enough I suppose you'll be putting them behind the counter in some green-grocer's, one of these days!"

Lally said nothing.

"If you kept an hotel it wouldn't seem so bad," said Matthew, looking up suddenly with an animation that betrayed the fact that he was speaking for the first time upon his own initiative. "If you kept an hotel we could make it a limited company. We could all take shares. We could recommend it to the right kind of people. We could stay there ourselves whenever we were in the city." His excitement grew with every word he uttered. He turned from Lally to Kate. "That's not a bad idea. Is it?" He turned back to Lally again. "You'll have to stay the night, now," he said, enthusiastically, showing that he had not believed before that it was worth her while to comply with their wishes.

"I can't stay," said Lally faintly.

"Of course you can." Matthew dismissed her difficulties unheard. "You'll have to stay," he said. "Your room is ready. Isn't it?"

"It's all ready," said Nonny. "I told them to light a fire in it and to put a hot jar in the bed." As an afterthought she explained further. "We were going to fix up a room for you here but with all the fuss we didn't have time to attend to it and I thought that the simplest thing to do was to send out word to the Station Hotel that they were to fix up a nice room for you. They have the room all ready. I went out to see it. It's a big airy room with a nice big bed. It has two windows, and it looks out on the ball alley. You'll be more comfortable there than here. Of course I could put a stretcher into my room if you like but I think for your own sake you ought to leave things as I arranged them. You'll get a better night's rest. If you sleep here it may only remind you of things you'd rather forget."

"I'm very grateful to you, Nonny, for all the trouble you took. I'm grateful to all of you. But I can't stay."

"Why?" said someone then, voicing the look in every face. "I have things to attend to!"

“What things?”

“Different things. You wouldn’t understand.”

“They can wait.”

“No,” said Lally. “I must go. There is a woman coming tonight to the room on the landing, and I’ll have to be there to help her settle in her furniture.”

“Have you got her address?” said Matthew.

“Why?” said Lally.

“You could send her a telegram canceling the arrangement.”

“Oh, but that would leave her in a hobble,” said Lally.

“What do you care? You’ll never see her again. When we start the hotel you’ll be getting a different class of person altogether.”

“I’ll never start an hotel,” said Lally. “I won’t make any change now. I’d hate to be making a lot of money and Robert gone where he couldn’t profit by it. It’s too late now. I’m too old now.”

She looked down at her thin hands, with the broken fingernails, and the fine web of lines deepened by dirt. And as she did so the others looked at her, too. They all looked at her; at this sister that was younger than all of them, and a chill descended on them as they read their own decay in hers. They had been better preserved, that was all; hardship had hastened the disintegration of her looks, but the undeniable bending of the bone, the tightening of the skin, and the fading of the eye could not be guarded against. A chill fell on them. A grudge against her gnawed at them.

“I begin to see,” said Matthew, “that Mother was right. I begin to see what she meant when she said that you were as obstinate as a tree.”

“Did she say that?” said Lally, and her face lit up for a moment with the sunlight of youth, as her mind opened wide in a willful vision of tall trees, leafy, and glossy with light, against a sky as blue as the feathers in a young girl’s hat.

Nonny stood up impatiently. “What is the use of talking?” she said. “No one can do anything for an obstinate person. They must be left to go their own way. But no one can say we didn’t do our best.”

"I'm very grateful," said Lally again.

"Oh, keep your thanks to yourself!" said Nonny. "As Matthew said we didn't do it for your sake. It's not very nice to have people coming back from the city saying that they met you, and we knowing all the time the old clothes you were likely to be wearing, and your hair all tats and taws, and your face dirty maybe, if all was told!"

"Do you ever look at yourself in a mirror?" said Matthew.

"What came over you that you let your teeth go so far?" said Kate. "They're disgusting to look at." She shivered.

"I'd be ashamed to be seen talking to you," said Nonny.

Through the silent evening air there was a far sound of a train shunting. Through the curtains the signal lights on the railway line could be seen changing from red to green. Even when the elderly maid-servant came in with the heavy brass lamp the green light shone through the pane, insistent as a thought.

"What time is it?" said Lally.

"You have plenty of time," said Matthew, and his words marked the general acceptance of the fact that she was going.

Tea was hurried in on a tray. A messenger was sent running upstairs to see if Lally's gloves were on the bed in Kate's room.

"Where did you leave them?" someone kept asking every few minutes and going away in the confusion without a satisfactory answer.

"Do you want to have a wash?" Nonny asked. "It will freshen you for the journey. I left a jug of water on the landing."

And once or twice, lowering his voice to a whisper, Matthew leaned across the table and asked her if she was absolutely certain that she was all right for the journey back. Had she a return ticket? Had she loose change for the porters?

But Lally didn't need anything, and when it came nearer to the time of the train, it appeared that she did not even want the car to take her to the station.

"But it's wet!" said Matthew.

"It's as dark as a pit outside," said Kate.

And all of them, even the maid-servant who was clearing

away the tray, were agreed that it was bad enough for people to know she was going back the very night that her mother was lowered into the clay, without adding to the scandal by giving people a chance to say that her brother Matthew wouldn't leave her to the train in his car, and it pouring rain.

"They'll say we had a difference of opinion over the will," said Nonny, who retained one characteristic at least of youth, its morbid sensitivity.

"What does it matter what they say," said Lally, "as long as we know it isn't true?"

"If everyone took that attitude it would be a queer world," said Matthew.

"There's such a thing as keeping up appearances," said Kate, and she threw a hard glance at Lally's coat. "Is that coat black or is it blue?" she asked suddenly, catching the sleeve of it and pulling it nearer to the lamp.

"It's almost black," said Lally. "It's a very dark blue. I didn't have time to get proper mourning, and the woman next door lent me this. She said you couldn't tell it from black."

Nonny shrugged her shoulders and addressed herself to Matthew. "She's too proud to accept things from her own but she's not too proud to accept things from strangers."

A train whistle shrilled through the air.

"I must go," said Lally.

She shook hands with them all. She looked up the stairway that the coffin had been carried down that morning. She put her hand on the door. While they were persuading her again to let them take her in the car, she opened the door and ran down the street.

They heard her footsteps on the pavement in the dark, as they had heard them often when she was a young girl running up the town on a message for their mother. And just as in those days, when she threw a coat over her head with the sleeves dangling, and ran out, the door was wide open upon the darkness. Matthew hesitated for a minute and then he closed the door.

"Why didn't you insist?" said Kate.

"With people like Lally there is no use wasting your breath.

They have their own ways of looking at things and nothing will change them. You might as well try to catch a falling leaf as try to find out what's at the back of Lally's mind."

They stood in the cold hallway. Suddenly Kate began to cry awkwardly.

"Why are you crying now?" said Nonny. "You were great at the cemetery. You kept us all from breaking down. Why are you crying now?" Her own voice had thinned and she dug her fingers into Matthew's sleeve.

"It's Lally!" said Kate. "None of you remember her as well as I do. I made her a dress for her first dance. It was white muslin with blue bows all down the front. Her hair was like light." Kate sobbed with thick hurtful sobs that shook her whole frame and shook Matthew's thin dried-up body when he put his arm around her.

Lally ran along the dark streets of the country town as she had run along them long ago as a young girl, and hardly remembered to slacken into a walking pace when she came to the patches of yellow lamplight that flooded out from shop windows and the open doors of houses near the Square. But the excitement of running now was caused by the beat of blood in her temple and the terrible throbbing of the heart. As a child it had been an excitement of the mind, for then it had seemed that the bright world ringed the town around, and that somewhere outside the darkness lay the mystery of life; one had only to run on, on past the old town gate, on under the dark railway bridge, on a little way, out the twisty road, and you would reach the heart of that mystery. Someday she would go.

And one day she went. But there was no mystery now, anywhere. Life was just the same in the town, in the city, and in the twisty countryside. Life was the same in the darkness and the light. It was the same for the spinster and for the draggled mother of a family. You were yourself always, no matter where you went or what you did. You didn't change. Her brothers and sisters were the same as they always were. She herself was the same as she always was, although her teeth were rotted, and a blue feather in her hat now would make her look like an old hag in a pantomime. Nothing you did made any

real change in you. You might think beforehand that it would make a great change, but it wouldn't make any change. There was only one thing that could change you and that was death. And no one knew what that change would be like.

No one knew what death was like but people made terrible torturing guesses. Fragments of the old penny catechism she had learned by rote in school came back to her, distorted by a bad memory and a confused emotion. Pictures of flames and screaming souls writhing on gridirons rose before her mind as she ran down the street to the station. The whistle of the train when it screamed in the darkness gave a reality to her racing thoughts, and she paused and listened to it for a moment. Then turning rapidly around she ran back a few paces in the way that she had come and groped along the dark wall that lined the street at this point.

The wet black railings of a gate came in contact with her fingers. This was the gate leading to the residence of the canon. She banged the gate back against the piers with the fierce determination with which she opened it. She ran up the wet gravelly drive to the priest's house.

In the dark she could not find the brass knocker and she beat against the panels of the door with her hard hands. The door was thrown open after a minute with a roughness that matched the rough knocking.

“What in the name of God do you want?” said an elderly woman with an apron that blazed white in the darkness.

“I want to see the canon!” said Lally.

“He's at his dinner,” said the woman, aggressively, and went to close the door.

“I must see him,” said Lally and she stepped into the hallway.

“I can't disturb him at his meals,” said the woman, but her anger had softened somewhat at seeing that Lally was a stranger to her. Two emotions cannot exist together and a strong curiosity possessed her at the moment. “What name?” she said.

“Lally Conroy,” said Lally, the old associations being so

strong that her maiden name came more naturally to her lips than the name she had carried for twenty-four years.

The housekeeper went across the hall and opened a door on the left. She closed it after her but the lock did not catch and the door slid open again. Lally heard the conversation distinctly, but with indifference, as she sat down on the polished mahogany chair in the hall.

"There's a woman outside who insists on seeing you, Father."

"Who is she?" said the priest, his voice muffled, as if by a serviette wiped across his mouth.

"She gave her name as Conroy," said the woman, "and she has a look of Matthew Conroy, but I never saw her before and she's dressed like a pauper."

The priest's voice was slow and meditative. "I heard that there was another sister," he said, "but there was a sad story about her, I forget what it was." A chair scraped back. "I'll see her," he said. And his feet sounded on the polished floor as he crossed the room toward the hall.

Lally was sitting on the stiff chair with the wooden seat, shielding her face from the heat of the flames that dragged themselves like serpents along the logs in the fireplace.

"Father, I'm in a hurry. I'm going away on this train." The train had shrilled its whistle once again in the darkness outside. "I'm sorry to disturb you. I only wanted to ask a question." Her short phrases leaped uncontrollably as the leaping flames in the grate. "I want to know if you will say a mass for my mother first thing in the morning? My name is Lally Conroy. I'll send you the offering money the minute I get back to the city. I'll post it tonight. Will you do that, Father? Will you?" As if the interview was over she stood up and began to go toward the door, backward, without waiting for an answer, repeating her urgent question, "Will you? Will you do that, Father? First thing in the morning!"

The canon took out a watch from under the cape of his shiny canonical robes.

"You have six minutes, yet," he said. "Sit down. Sit down."

"No, no, no," said Lally. "I mustn't miss the train."

The whistle blew again and the sound seemed to race her thoughts to a gallop.

“I want three masses to be said,” she exclaimed, “but I want the first one to be said at once, tomorrow, first thing in the morning. You’ll have the offering money as soon as I get back. I’ll post it, tonight.”

The canon looked at the shabby boots and the thick stockings, the rubbed coat with the faded stitching on it.

“There is no need to worry about masses. She was a good woman,” he said. “And I understand that she left a large sum in her will for masses to be said for her after her death. Three hundred pounds, I believe, or thereabouts; a very considerable sum at any rate. There is no need for worry on that score.”

“It’s not the same thing to leave money yourself for masses. It’s the masses that other people have said for you that count.” Her excitement leaped like the leaping flames. “I want a mass said for her with my money! With my money!”

The priest leaned forward with an unusual and ungovernable curiosity.

“Why?” he said.

“I’m afraid,” said Lally. “I’m afraid she might suffer. I’m afraid for her soul.” The eyes that stared into the flaming heart of the fire were indeed filled with fear, and as a coal fell, revealing a gaping abyss of fire, those eyes filled with absolute horror. The reflection of the flames leaped in them. “She was very bitter.” Lally Conroy sobbed for the first time since she had news of her mother’s death. “She was very bitter against me all the time, and she died without forgiving me. I’m afraid for her soul.” She looked up at the priest. “You’ll say them as soon as ever you can, Father?”

“I’ll say them,” said the priest. “But don’t worry about the money. I’ll offer them from myself.”

“That’s not what I want,” said Lally, angrily. “I want them to be paid for with my money. That is what will count most; that they are paid for out of my money.”

Humbly the priest in his stiff canonical robes, piped with red, accepted the dictates of the draggled woman in front of him.

"I will do as you wish," he said. "Is there anything else troubling you?"

"The train! The train!" said Lally, and she fumbled the catch of the door.

The priest took out his watch again.

"You have just time to catch it," he said, "if you hurry," and he opened the door. Lally ran out into the dark again.

For a moment she felt peace at the thought of what she had done, and running down the wet gravelly drive with the cold rain beating on her flushed face, her mind was filled with the practical thoughts about the journey home. But when she got into the hot and stuffy carriage of the train, where there was an odor of dust and of wet soot, the tears began to stream down her face again, and she began to wonder if she had made herself clear to the canon. She put her head out the carriage window as the train began to leave the platform and she called out to a porter who stood with a green flag in his hand.

"What time does this train arrive in the city?" she asked, but the porter could not hear her. He put his hand to his ear but just then the train rushed into the darkness under the railway bridge. Lally let the window up and sat back in the seat.

If the train got in before midnight, she thought, she would ring the night bell at the Franciscan Friary and ask for a mass to be said there and then for her mother's soul. She had heard that masses were said night and day in the Friary. She tried to remember where she had heard that, and who had told her, but her thoughts were in confusion. She leaned her head back against the cushions as the train roared into the night, and feverishly she added the prices she would get from the tenants in the top rooms and subtracted the amount that would be needed to buy food for herself and the children for the week. She would have a clear two pound ten. She could have ten masses said at least for that. There might even be money over to light some holy lamps at the Convent of Perpetual Reparation.

She tried to comfort herself by these calculations, but as the dark train rushed through the darkness she sat more upright on

the red carpeted seats that smelled of dust, and clenched her hands tightly as she thought of the torments of Purgatory. Bright red sparks from the engine flew past the carriage window, and she began to pray with rapid unformed words that jostled themselves in her mind like sheafs of burning sparks.

As an appendix for possible male  
readers, here is G. B. Stern's

*"What Women Do When  
They Are Alone"*



# What Women Do When They Are Alone

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by G. B. STERN

IN A novel by a woman writer, we very rarely find a male character left alone on the scene. For the truth is, few women writers will take the risk of imagining what men do when they are alone. Men may light their pipes, stroll to the looking glass and adjust the old-school tie; even, sentimentally, apostrophize a photograph or confide brokenly in their faithful dog. But perhaps they do none of these things. After all, we are not too sure what we do ourselves when we are alone, unless we deliberately try to let memory follow us about with a ciné-kodak.

It may sound paradoxical, but I should say that women are much less natural alone than with others. In company, talking, eating, playing games, entertaining and being entertained, we forget ourselves. Alone, and startled suddenly at being "I" without a "you," we are apt to give a performance just out of bravado to prove to this I, this almost stranger I, that we are in no need of outside support.

The most obvious thing for a woman to do for an hour is to write letters. We do not write them. We may go to the telephone, look up a number and dial it, and then gently replace the receiver on hearing from the other end the very voice we had ourselves summoned out of the ether. Desire to talk was not strong enough; and already that solitary feeling had become pleasant, a privilege, a circle of faint magic; a pity to break it; life comes along with a hatchet seventy times a day to break it, so leave it to life. It is fun to be alone if by our own wish; self-pity creeps in only when circumstances have

forced us to be alone. So we replace the receiver with a small delighted sense of guilt, and move idly over to that table which has needed tidying for so long; all those books and magazines and some odd letters that have strayed across from the desk; the telephone directory has no right there, nor the atlas, nor the volume of the encyclopedia from "Libi" to "Mary." The atlas falls open, and being very shaky on our geography outside Europe, we are surprised to find that Madagascar is just off South Africa; not that we had thought it was anywhere else in particular, but we just didn't think it was there. Oh, well!

Before throwing away half a newspaper several months old, you glance at it to make sure that it has not been kept for some vital reason, and in sheer idleness reread several times the fact that the city of Oxford is in want of a senior library assistant, and a column of qualifications.

By the time you have laid this aside, your soul is invaded by a curious melancholy. You sit down, not very comfortably because your knitting bag has been left in the armchair (if you remove it, you will have to contemplate that dropped stitch three rows back), and begin to compile a mental list of people who would care if you died. The feminine brain runs to list-making. Jane Austen's Emma used to make list after list of the books she intended reading and the course of study she meant to pursue for the next six months: "And very handsome lists they were, too," said Mr. Knightley. There are shopping lists and dinner-party lists and that list of birthday presents you want if anyone should ask (but do they? never!). And lists of the clothes you mean to take with you when you go away. But these are all lists that have to be written down. The list of people who would care if you died is too short to be written down.

Melancholy increases, and you say out loud: "Do you know, you're a most awful fool?" and "Shut up" and "Stop it, I tell you!" Restored to a more vigorous state of mind by the sound of your own voice, you find yourself singing the motif of the last movement of Beethoven's Choral Symphony, or perhaps over and over again, "Come if yo' loves me, mah moonlight Lou," a refrain learned from Nanny nearly forty years ago.

You are still singing it while you stroll into the bedroom in search of useful occupation, and pause at the looking glass, catching snapshots of yourself from the front and from either side and three-quarter face. Three-quarter face is really very disconcerting. No woman should have a three-quarter face to catch her unawares like that. You scowl at this unnatural female and she scowls back. Then you try two or three different effects with your hair, and so does she. It hardly improves matters, and you are still singing "Mah moonlight Lou."

Suddenly, by one of those extraordinary leaps which happen in the subconscious, you are in the middle of mentally justifying yourself to Caroline over that very peculiar letter, that most unfair letter, that wholly inaccurate letter which you received from her a fortnight ago by the last post, which you hoped would have brought something nice to atone for a horrid day. Anyhow, you had dealt with Caroline immediately, and the whole thing had been amicably settled. Now, by yourself, three-quarter face, one portion of your brain engaged with "Mah moonlight Lou," it seems that you have not really made clear your point of view. You are such a splendid person really, so loyal, so warm-hearted, yet with just that touch of dignified reserve: "Now look here, Caroline, please try and keep quiet for a moment and understand. . . ."

And so an hour slips away into limbo.

You have, like nearly all women, amassed a hoard of odd bits of broken jewelry, painted buttons and clasps and monograms from disused handbags, beads from an unstrung necklace, old-fashioned pendants, an earring without its fellow, lucky charms and birthstones, a gold pencil, the small silver and tortoise-shell *étui* that Aunt Teresa had said you were to have when she died, regimental badges with long-past romantic incidents to explain them. . . . This heterogeneous collection, as distinct, of course, from orthodox jewelry, is usually kept in a lidless box in the left-hand top drawer of your dressing table. You will now, in the second hour of your solitude, pull it out with the idea that something useful and astringent can be done about it, such as seeing whether the buttons will match a new cocktail dress; whether one of the pendants will

do for a niece's fourteenth birthday; and surely this old badge which catches in everything can be thrown away at last? I mean, what's the sense of keeping it when you've almost forgotten the name of the man who. . . . They say cameos are coming back into fashion, worn in a different place, of course; if this is gold, the price is something like thirty-two shillings an ounce now, or is that avoirdupois? No, troy weight. Troy weight. . . . Back to school again, and you sit quite a long time in a reverie, hearing childish voices chant in unison: "Sixteen-ounces-one-pound-fourteen-pounds-one-stone." . . .

"My God, that reminds me!" Back goes the whole collection into the box, the drawer banged, this is the third day running that you haven't taken your tablets nor weighed yourself. You can take the tablets now, though they should be swallowed just before a meal, yet it can't make much difference as long as they go inside you. But you eye the weighing machine in the bathroom in an indecisive manner. Then you begin undressing, but without much conviction of future happiness. The weighing machine watches you cynically; it has your doctor's eyes. A weighing machine is in the masculine gender, and like many men it has neither tact nor imagination. You step onto it with as light a step as apprehension will allow; come off it again rather quickly, and scribble it down wrong on the chart. Who cares!















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